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The Cheveley Novels.

SAUL WEIR.

"They went down accordingly, in line—Adam first, Noah last, with a sly look at a pretty girl with dust-pan and broom just going up the stairs."—PAGE 466.

Frontispiece.

The Cheveley Novels.

SAUL WEIR.

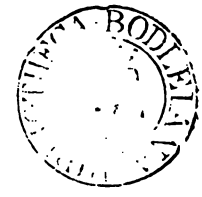
BY THE AUTHOR OF

'A MODERN MINISTER.'

"God appointed for him a more extended arena, and a longer racecourse, that thou mightest the more carefully observe this athlete."
—CHRYSOSTOM.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS,
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PRINCESS ZENAÏDE . . .	An exiled Princess of Spain.
PRINCE SEBASTIAN . . .	Her Son.
DOWAGER LADY NUGENT . .	An aged Gentlewoman, with a talent for diplomacy.
LADY EMILY FULLER . .	THE RETREAT, MEADOWFORD.
LORD LAWRENCE NUGENT .	A Patron of the Fine Arts.
LORD GASCOYNE . . .	Whose sylvan adventures are not without interest.
ETTA LUTE	A Young Heiress.
PETER PAUL POTTER . .	Gentlemen of the Sheridan Club.
THEODORE LUTE . . .	
RUPERT REDLAND . . .	
OLIVER REDLAND . . .	A Modern Alchemist.
DOBSON	Proprietor of a Travelling Panorama.
MERRY TATTERGAST . .	Lecturer attached to the same.
JESSIE	His adopted Sister.
NOEBA EDRED . . .	An eccentric Old Servant, sometime of the HERONGATE, SUFFOLK.
HUGH EDRED	Her Son, for whom she holds in reserve a Great Prize.

Archie Campbell	A Young Poet from the North.
Saul Weir	A Self-Educated Artizan.
Louise	A Nymph of the Woodlands.
Joseph Clark, Richard Clark, Charles Clark, Thomas Clark, James Clark, Philip Clark, Robert Clark	Attendant Satyrs: her Cousins.
John Clark	Their Father: a wealthy Farmer.
Boggis and Blim	A Firm of rascally Land-Surveyors.
Phineas Beaver	A retired Hatter, late of the Strand.
Phineas Junior	His Son: an unpleasant person.
Mr Adam Tomkins, Mr Seth Tomkins, Mr Noah Tomkins	An unexceptionable Family: known generally as the Brothers Tomkins.
Timothy Figg	An Original.
Jemima Tottles,	Timothy Figg's *fiancée*.
Cobham Masheter, Esq.	A Country Gentleman — The Herongate, Suffolk.
Mary Masheter	His Invalid Daughter.
Dr Virgil	Preceptor of Hillsland College.
Ethel	A Pretty Girl, only Daughter of the Doctor.
Ada Sylvester	Governess at Brunswick House.
Daisy	Her young Sister.
Mr St Luke Lillingston	The Owner of Brunswick House
Mrs St Luke Lillingston	A Lady whose nerves are in a very unsatisfactory condition.

Adrienne Bernardin	A kind-hearted Milliner, whose pleasing qualities are generally esteemed.
M. Pierre Antoine Gaspard	Treacherous adviser of the Princess.
Snapper, Bulltack, Ackrift	Thames-side Marine Store and Curiosity Dealers.
Mrs Rebecca Root	A Florist.
Benjamin Balsam	Her Man.
Lily	The Man's Daughter.
William Gobble, Esq.	of Gobble Drakes, Lincolnshire.
Francis Grattan	Proprietor of a famous old Book Store in Liverpool.
Agnes Sedgwick	His Granddaughter.
Mrs Steele	His Housekeeper, with a theory of research in the matter of second-hand books.
"Beauty" Penryllon, George Herrick	Boys of opposite type.
Jediah Lufkin	A Mormon.
Kate Warden	of Meadowford Water-Mill.
Ralph Ranger	With a curious taste for taking close inspection of the trunks of trees.
Isaacs	Dealer in Old Paintings, especially sensitive to the honour of the Masters.
Mrs Pomfret	Companion to the Princess.
Dr Chancel	Bishop of Beechester.
Mrs Potter	A Fugitive from Tyranny.
Jebeson, Wattle, and Crick	An Odd Firm.

Mr Jonadab Sneezer . .	The Sublime Couple.
Miss Jochebed Sneezer . .	
Coleman Dukes, Esq. . .	Mayor of Beechester.
Sir Toodleum Tummytot .	A Vulgarian in high places.
Goldworthy Price, Esq. .	Beech Park, Beechester.
Samuel Johnson, Esq., LL.D. .	Adviser-in-Chief to Beechester and Neighbourhood.
Miss Cramp . . .	Visitors at Beech Park.
Miss Cramp's Mamma . .	

SAUL WEIR.

CHAPTER I.

WANTED: A LECTURER FOR A TRAVELLING PANORAMA.

DOBSON'S Panorama was an established success. The proprietor had introduced his extensive canvas to the enlightened inhabitants of the chief towns of Great Britain, and the enterprise proved remunerative; Dobson was rewarded! Large audiences flocked to the Panorama; the treasury flourished, and Dobson was the happiest man travelling with a Panorama.

Then accident, which will not permit even travelling entertainers to enjoy unmitigated bliss, befell Dobson and worried him exceedingly. His attendant lecturer decamped in the very middle of a prosperous week at Canterbury, and Dobson was at his wits' end; for, never having acquired the graceful accomplishment of oratory, being indeed entirely destitute of learning of all sorts, Dobson could not on this sudden and unlooked-for emergency take his lecturer's place.

That gentleman had been a singularly gifted genius, especially in the art of invention, and had done more towards misinforming the public than any man before him. Dobson knew not how to supply his place. A man must have a

special talent for lecturing with a Panorama. While instructing he must amuse, be equally familiar with history and *bon mots*, possess a retentive memory, an intimate acquaintance with the poets: his mind must be a storehouse of anecdote, and his invention ready and witty. Dobson had just such a one in his service but the scamp had flown, and the proprietor was reduced to an extremity of great unpleasantness and inconvenience. Dobson was a worthy fellow enough, who paid his way and was civil to all men, and he could not understand being treated in this shabby fashion. Had he coined a sovereign by every uttered word Dobson could not have lectured. To close the exhibition was contrary to his principles; in matters of business, well grounded, determined obstinacy, formed the basis of Dobson's principles. To exhibit the Panorama without the lecture would be to break faith with the public, whose special attention was drawn, in the various bills posted about the city and hung in the shops, to the intellectual portion of the entertainment. So that take it for all in all, Dobson was, really, critically placed.

Being a man of ready resource, Mr Dobson did not succumb to the embarrassing dilemma. Bethinking him profoundly, casting out the grappling-hooks of ingenuity, compressing the exigencies of the situation, Dobson decided that nothing was to be gained by going to town with the hope of securing the services of a professional lecturer—he knew these are never at home when wanted in a hurry, and never come in when one is impatiently waiting for them: professional gentleman negatived accordingly. There was no time to advertise; the man was required for that very night. It would not do to throw himself upon the toleration of the public, explaining how he was circumstanced: the public has violent antipathy to explanations of the kind and resolutely declines to tolerate. In the case of a company of performers the absence of one may be overlooked, but where one—— realize taking Artemus Ward from his Panorama, or further back, the brilliant and witty Albert Smith! Thus the situation inspired Dobson with disgust, notwithstanding which he conceived a good idea, and proceeded at once to put it into execution.

Dobson's Panorama had not yet been elsewhere in Kent, and Dobson, in pursuance of his scheme, took the train to Ramsgate, and without loss of time walked to the Sands. It was the month of July, and warm; the usual number of people idled about the pleasant resort; the fresh breeze from the sea and cool aspect of the water were eminently refreshing, and Mr Dobson revived wonderfully, while he scrutinized with shrewdly observant glances the mixed patrons of the beach.

When London is upon wing and the shops deserted, the Kentish watering-places prosper. Then is the time for studying those ardent and enthusiastic geographers, at once our awe and wonderment, whose extensive familiarity with the Isle of Thanet amounts to the supernatural: the genus who inspire some people with the sarcasms, while giving others the fidgets.

Somebody once said that life was too short to read other people's travels; we had barely time to make our own. But this cynical and contracted view is balanced by that of some wise man who loves 'Bradshaw,' and possesses innumerable copies of that interesting publication, who has spent half a lifetime in the study of the monthly numbers of that great work, and has personally walked over the ground at Clapham Junction when solving a problem, making, possibly, a final testament to the effect that the current number of his favourite literature is to be enclosed in the wicker wherein his remains will be laid, with thistle-down—the nearest botanical approach to his ideal order of existence.

Mr Dobson took a cautious review of company upon the Sands, which, to this man of thousand-miles-Panoramas, presented a small peep-show and magic-lantern order of picture. Mr Dobson saw a quantity of people, most of whom seemed to have been steeped in oil, wearing considerable colour, of the florid school generally; saw many damsels, the young ones slightly bold-looking—and a variety of staid and decorous matrons, with sun-shades heavy as banners, and large-patterned cambric costumes; saw groups of young men, wearing negligent styles, terrific checks, bright-coloured ties, rings of the design of small quoits, and hats and caps essentially selected

for comfort: saw boys and girls all buoyancy and delight, with laughter and shouts ringing the length of the fair; stolid London traders looking on half amused, half irritated; and some genteel people, sitting with propriety upon seats they liked to pay for—on no account to be confused with the merry souls who preferred the sand pure and simple. A motley mosaic altogether, a gleaming patchwork of human kind, with the broad sunshine making light the darker corners of London-shaped destinies, and lending a false glow to cheeks, false glitter to eyes, that were all too pale and dim. Dobson took the scene in carefully, from end to end, as unrolled before the spectator, and being something of a philosopher, albeit of the uncultivated sort and of rough-and-ready expression, he quietly stretched himself upon the sand, at a point chosen after concise, sharp inspection. Here Mr Dobson viewed at leisure the amusing scene, every now and then directing a searching side glance at a singular-looking being whom he had elected to recline beside. It was a half-doleful, half-comical cast of countenance that had taken Mr Dobson; the man looked bright and clever, but somewhat down in the world; with some freshening, he would present a sharp professional-like exterior; he seemed likely to assent to proposals—in need of some friendly assistance, and in fact, exactly the being clever Mr Dobson had expected to come across; he was vastly taken, too, by a humorous play that relieved all the sorrow and sadness the features might else have expressed. And he was emphatically good-looking. Mr Dobson paid great attention to address; true, his lecturer often stood in a bad light, but Mr Dobson made good address an imperative qualification.

The young man was dressed in a grey suit, repaired in places; a low-crowned grey cloth hat, wherein was stuck a long feather he had picked up on the beach; his shirt-front was untidy, and marked in original design where he had dropped egg thereon, yet was it frilled and of fine quality; one of his fingers was slightly circled where a ring had been worn; his boots were very bad, and more than anything denoted extremity. Noticing the other taking these in with the quick inventory of his

other properties, the young man, who was a degree sensitive, pushed them into the sand, the Panorama-man looking another way. After the other had sufficiently interred his toes, Mr Dobson spoke—

"A glorious morning, sir—a glorious morning! Make it good for business!"

At mention of "business" the gentleman with the feather made a wry face, turned over upon his back, and looking up at the fleecy clouds, replied, with lugubrious irony—

"Chief thing the sun shines for, I suppose—business!"

"Ah! you're tired of it," said the wary Dobson; "have run away for a little change! Quite right."

The young man nodded. "Glad you approve—I'm fond of approbation."

It was said with a dry and quiet manner, and a coolness almost amounting to drollery. Dobson congratulated himself upon his foresight, and with some cordiality invited his new acquaintance to go and have a glass of something at the hotel.

"No, thanks; I don't care to accept what it will not be convenient to return; besides, drinking makes me hot."

A man with a monkey passed, the monkey gripped the ornament in the speaker's hat; he watched the theft with a smile. "That's the sort of life, you know!"

Mr Dobson, who had been looking with some contempt upon this other caterer for the public, saw the turning of the remark to account, and with gravity, as wishing his sincerity to be understood, he answered—

"If you were in earnest, sir—that is to say, if your prospects were at a low ebb, and you really wished for some occupation for a while, I could offer you a post well suited to your talents, or I am mistaken."

"Say on," said the other, still indolent, yet interested; hands stretched out right and left of him, filled with sand, as though to keep him from floating up, his pockets being so very light.

Then Mr Dobson spoke with modest pride and assurance. "I am the proprietor of Dobson's Panorama—known to you of course by name if you have never seen that work of art. The

best of entertainments is subject to accident. Owing to unavoidable circumstances I am deprived of the services of my lecturer; now if you feel up to it, you can take his place."

The young man's eyes opened some degrees wider; and beautiful eyes they were, with the bright blue sky reflected therein.

"Quite at your service; what ground do you go over?"

"Canterbury! Stationed there for a week——"

"No, no; the Panorama? What part of the world are you illustrating?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon: Holland, Belgium, and the Rhine!"

"Very old," murmured the young man, an almost painful expression flitting athwart his mobile, careless, half reckless-looking countenance: it was but for an instant. "I daresay I could manage to amuse your people for an hour over that track. I was out that way once upon a time, and know something of the country." He was still watching the clouds as though they evolved a plan of some route or tracery of a journey made in happier times. His hands were emptied of ballast now, and interlaced under his head, pillow-fashion, raising it so that he could look Dobson horizontally in the face. "When are we off to Holland?" he asked.

"As soon as you're ready," said Dobson, to whom time was an object.

"Now before we proceed further with our understanding, Mr Dobson, I should like to explain that I am not quite alone; I am sole protector of a little sister who roughs it with me, on short commons often, but—I take care of her, and that's something."

Dobson was interested. It has been noted that he was not a hard-hearted man, and the idea of this graceful, idle, moneyless young fellow being the self-styled protector of a little sister was so unexpected and out of the common, it interested him. But business before sentiment, and Dobson asked, "Can she sing?"

"Not in public!" coolly replied the one in grey, sitting up now and looking more of a man and somewhat tough.

Mr Dobson did not extend inquiry, would not permit it to

interfere with the satisfactory arrangements existing, but saying, "Meet me at the station in an hour," arose, with a very pleasant expression of countenance, and sauntered onward towards another part of the beach. Mr Dobson was well pleased, and looked upon his fellow-beings disporting themselves at the seaside with an agreeable blending of benevolence and speculation. Would this gay throng appreciate the elevated recreation it was his privilege to provide? No! He mentally decided this was not the audience composing the silent and attentive gazers upon the gradual development of illustrative geography. The man with the monkey, the negro minstrels, the Punch and Judy, the woman with the tambourine, the tenor singer, the trained canaries—all in the small and irregular way. Mr Dobson drew himself up slightly, and, properly impressed with a sense of the dignity of that higher entertainment of which he was the proprietor, strolled off the ground with quiet pride, crossed the road, and entering a hostelry, called for a pint of half-and-half.

Three keen-looking gentlemen who were drinking at the bar greeted the entrance of the innocent stranger with telegraphic celerity, and one of them took a dirty pack of cards from his pocket, and shuffling them with magical finish, invited the new-comer to take one: while deeply appreciative, Dobson respectfully declined, but with a look in those eyes, so used to the behind-the-scenes of many countries, eminently discomforting to enterprise.

Then Mr Dobson resumed his way through the classic streets of Ramsgate. While lacking the old-world picturesque form and colour of Canterbury, these streets still present a sufficiently varied picture to please the eye of a travelling philosopher. Mr Dobson was never particular so long as there was plenty to look at; he cherished an aphorism regarding art that was characteristic, and might account for the high colour which constituted a special feature of the Panorama. "Don't palm off greys and drabs on to people who pay for reds and yellows!" There was an essentially red and yellow tinge about Ramsgate that pleased Mr Dobson immensely: its port and harbour of refuge preserved the local glow, which

was reflected upon the patrons of its saline benefits; so that if its houses lacked tawny and reddened age, the venerable aspect was compensated for.

Very free, very informal, are the manners of the visitors: enjoyment is the honest purpose, and the frigid is not to touch this with its cold finger in Ramsgate. Very ardent, very faithful, is the love of the Londoner for this resort. Pale faces from small shops, pale faces from close rooms, come here to catch a tint or two of the ruddier colour we associate with health; they inhale all the ozone possible, to last them the trail of months; and when they go away take strips of broad moist sea-weed to hang in the back rooms (and they are very fond of this weed, would not barter it for a dozen roots of musk); baskets of shells also, which the little ones dream over, fanciful musings of delights coming but once a-year; dreams of sunny reaches, dancing boats, and a glistening breadth that seems strung with gems to the very sky. We may go to vastly finer resorts where we shall admire silks in lieu of hollands, and see people trying how well they can behave, but not find happier faces, for these people have so much of care in their daily lives they are resolute upon not bringing any of it with them—to the great relief of Thanet. Very pleasant after the heat of the day do the visitors find the fresh night bloom that rises from the sea, when the red light before the harbour stands out in relief from the dark sky studded with vivid stars, when the windows are all gleaming with light, and lanterns on the vessels present points of colour giving form to the shadowy bulk. Welcome enough has often been the cliff-summit line of lights, when vessels under heavy pressure in the Downs have sought the security between the piers; when from North to South Foreland has been one furious whirlpool—lightning darting to the seething eddies to be quenched in the great caldron of foam—flashing broad on the seamen of the floating beacon, their brown faces, fearless and firm, wearing for the time an unnatural appearance.

Irregular streets possess a certain attractiveness not shared by the plain mathematic precision in new streets of new

towns; there is absence of the formal that is distinctly agreeable, and there is not an uniform deadness, the emphatic feature of the stucco order. Some of the Ramsgate streets are irregular, giving architects the nightmare—but artists are pleased to find they are allowed to continue so. One of the Ramsgate houses, in one of the irregular streets, was of defiantly hideous putting together; built it was not, nor ever had been; gnomes apparently had pitched ugly little chambers one atop the other and left them; deformed chimneys grew somehow; loopholes fell in and doorways fell out, and a crooked old staircase was found to have twisted itself up from somewhere; there was a kitchen, but it was never discovered, and the half-wild owner used the front room. She was a doubled-up, sun-scorched, wind-battered, water-soaked old being of no sex nor gender, nor type nor description, utterly and out-and-out cured to the inflexibility of the most obstinate haddock strung up in Ramsgate; but the irregular dwelling she occupied was her own property, and was turned to account in more ways than one, the one generally recognised being the letting of lodgings. Here for a while had lodged the man clothed in grey; he loathed the quarters, but inasmuch as he could pay for no better, submitted, feeling more for the girl he had termed his sister than for himself, and striving mightily to temper some of the dirt so she should not be defiled.

It will be as well to account for these people, and explain their business with the story, or the touch of the disreputable about them may affright well-wishers from enjoying what is in store.

The girl's father had in his day known respectability, but it was not within the memory of his child; she had sometimes seen the forgiving smile upon her sick mother's face while telling, after a blow from his brutal hand, how gentle he had once been. And she had tried to forgive also, sought hungrily to think, if but one degree, better of him; but he would not afford an instant's leniency for tender remembrance—he was wholly, irretrievably bad, brutal, and vicious. His cruelty brought his wife to invalid health, and then he hated her for an encumbrance, and abated not by jot or tittle his violence. Most

beings of the fiendish order are content to reduce to hopeless illness the unfortunate woman who may be part of their property, but this wretch was not content. She died, patient, lovely, and forgiving; he swore at her, said she had died to spite him, and turned to vent his reserve of malice on her child. She was not yet sixteen, but what a sixteen years hers had been! She bore his hard words, busied upon acts of household call, ever striving for his comfort, but with such awful sorrow and mourning for the dear dead one, that lovely slaughtered mother, as only the great God knew of,—sorrow too bitter for tears or for any outlet of her agony.

Her name, Jessie, when spoken by the soft voice of her now dead, was a pretty name, full, musical, and winning. The era of its music fled with the gentle spirit that had been used to sound it as a tenderer chord; and it became a hurled Jess, fierce and grating, causing her trembling: it was a shrieked Jess, in the frenzy of intoxication: and a grumbled, muttered, sullen Jess, when next day he was down on the pallet.

Right and left of their habitation, afront and behind of them, were dingy dirty houses like their own, each with this or some other blighting curse and shadowing misfortune. She knew nothing of their neighbours; only that their fowls flew on to the wall dividing the black slips at the rear; their cats came down to the drear domain, but finding it a degree more destitute than their own sprang back again; their birds' song stole into the miserable rooms, and often the girl listened to the different language, wondering if she were not meant for some life more full of song than that which was grinding her youth away.

A pretty girl, with clear complexion, thin delicate features, eyes unusually bright and thoughtful-looking, hair of a wealthy soft-hued brown, with a natural wave or curl to it that was graceful and attractive. Some hair is more beautiful when uncared for, and left to its own luxuriant way: Jessie's was such, and somehow was always attractive.

Although so unhappily circumstanced, the girl's birth was not ignoble, and what good or refinement there had been in it came out in her.

After his wife's death her father became more morose and evil-tempered than ever; remorse was dragging at him, and he would not yield an inch, and flew at that silent patient girl as though she were the genius of remorse.

One night there was a dreadful scene: he was not intoxicated, but had been unfortunate all day without the means of obtaining drink, and he returned to assail his daughter with unparalleled cruelty. The time had come: Jessie stood calm and white, one hand leaning heavily upon the table, her slender frame shaken horribly by the inner struggle; but she was dauntless, and without fear while remonstrating with him.

"You have no right to use me like this, father. I have been working hard in the house all day to get things nice for you by the time you came home, and I do assure you, I try to please you. I know I am not very strong, but I do all that I can—yet cannot please you, try all I will, or ever have one kind word from you; and having no one else to speak kindly to me, I am very miserable."

The reproach goaded him. He was in one of his unnatural moods. "Get out with you," he shouted, "into the streets, and go to others for your kindness! I'll have no more of you!"

She had never seen him so bad as this. She walked trembling to his side, and timidly implored his pardon. It incensed him more, and he cast her from him, tearing her hat and shawl off the door and throwing them to her with an oath. Silently she put them on, hoping and believing he would as peremptorily order her to remain. But he was relentless,—literally turned this gentle, daintily-formed, suffering one into the bitter streets. It was not windy nor wet, as it happened, but it was evil enough without that.

She, walking up and down awhile, crying and uncertain, yearned to be forgiven and received back, even with blows. And she did venture to go to the house after some time, and he was sitting on the step smoking his pipe, but upon her appearance went inside, banging the door, and loudly fastening it for the night. Then Jessie turned her pale face otherwards, looking above the grimy place of bricks for strength,

walking feebly and feeling faint, scarce more than child as yet, and having to confront a great cold world. No wonder that her tears fell thick.

She was seen by a policeman, who roughly pushed her forward, saying, young girls shouldn't be loitering about that time of night. It was true, young girls should not; her heart assented too bitterly. She was seen by a young man quietly proceeding to his lodgings after spending the evening at a theatre,—seen to be weeping, to be unequal to walking far, and he sympathized with her and offered his arm to support her; and after having offered this—not before—he noticed how pretty and how young she was.

His voice was kind and won upon her, and his manners were far from coarse or insulting. In a few broken utterances she thanked him, and explained the sickening incidents. Such experiences were apparently not new to him; anyway he manifested but little surprise, abundance of sympathy however, and her sensitive heart thrilled to the kindness. He was very practical, very good-humoured, and explained, without the loss of a moment, this condensed memoir: "I am about as solitary a wretch as yourself, owned by nobody, and owning none. And I would have it so, rather than own or be owned by people of the disagreeable type, of whom there appear to be a superabundance. I am a distinct and irreclaimable vagabond: I tell you, so that we may understand one another, and that you may not place too implicit trust in a thoroughly worthless fellow. I am strictly, unmistakably poor, and never likely to better that condition, so the power to provide for another person is of the order of uncertainty; but if you like to share the changing fortunes of a reckless rover, here to-day and there to-morrow, all I can say is, you are very welcome. It will be a hand-to-mouth existence, plenty one day and nothing the next; but as I've managed to get along on it, perhaps you will do the same. I promise you there shall be neither words nor blows, and the best face possible put upon everything: more than this it is generally unsafe for me to promise."

It took her by surprise; it affected her; its kindness was

genuine; the solicitude was deep. A perfect stranger, met with after nightfall in the city by-ways,—it was all very strange; her dead mother, yearning over the future of the delicate child about to be left with none to look after and care for her, had warned her of the dangers of the streets. But an inner sense, the counterpart of that which warns, here prompted confidence, and she felt to be safe and sister-like, and looked upward again above those by-ways, saying simply, "I thank you, and will go with you, for to-night at least."

Thus it came about that the man and the maid joined fortunes. Odd fortunes they were, and innocent as the day. It was better than homeless wandering in the streets, and it was a shelter, although a poor one. Vagabond or no, his usage of her was chivalrous and gentlemanly, and wholly unselfish. He gave her of his best, and endured for her more severe privation than was known to any; and that her mind might be at rest (poor thing, she had never given that a thought!) and her heart unmoved by any coarse insinuation, it was *his sister* he took to the humble lodgings whithersoever they went. And this brother and sister somehow had met with plenty of kindness, albeit in poor regions.

Jessie had often thought with emotion of him who had cast her off. Had he not been an entirely unreasoning and unreasonable being, and an utterly hopeless specimen of obstinate tyranny, she would have made another attempt at conciliating him; but Jessie knew too well the nature of the material, and that any such attempt would be useless.

Her new brother was entitled Merry Tattergast; and a queer sign she thought it, until accustomed to the name, when it became familiar as a well-loved sound. Often she wondered whether it was bestowed by some one in recognition of his cheerful disposition, or whether he took the singular names in the ordinary way of relatives and sponsors; but he was reticent concerning their origin, merely remarking in a droll sort of way upon their appropriateness.

CHAPTER II.

MR DOBSON ENTERS CANTERBURY IN TRIUMPH.

MR MERRY TATTERGAST had reached the irregular lodging-house where he was sojourning for the time, and his face was glowing happily, for he was well pleased with the stroke of fortune come of an idle half-hour upon the beach. He was singing a pleasant ditty when he was checked, and his arm was caught. His face, turned on the instant, was front to front with a round-headed, closely-shorn individual, of unprepossessing, but in one sense interesting, appearance, since it set him speculating how long his head of hair had been taking on that worn-out hearth-broom finish, and whether one of our noble Government institutions had anything to do with it. Mr Tattergast's innate regard for the dignified, in the masculine way, animated some antipathy upon thus being so unceremoniously accosted by so unpleasing a person, and he assumed an annoyed expression. The stranger looked alarmingly like a tailor, and Mr Tattergast certainly had some few outstanding small accounts for repair of apparel. He was not scared by the person, but his abruptness was unpleasant. The person communicated the meaning thereof, and Mr Tattergast breathed again.

"Won't detain you long: just a word, please. Been lodging here, I think, some little time? Will you walk a step or two? Time valuable, no doubt, but I won't keep you!"

"I can spare time to hear what you have to say if you are quick about it."

They walked a few paces, and the man made the most of

the time; and it was singular how earnest he turned all at once, and while making the most of it.

"I am the inventor of a marvellous cure for the rheumatism —an embrocation of sovereign efficacy, affording permanent relief after patient application. I don't advertise, sir, nor seek the bubble reputation! My object is to extend extrication from distressing pain—my object is philanthropic!"

"I have no doubt you are very good," replied Mr Merry Tattergast; "but I haven't the rheumatism, and I beg you won't give it me!"

The inventor smiled: it was the smile of the medical man who is in possession of some all-potent panacea.

"Naturally I take a keen interest in acute instances of this awkward malady, and it having come to my knowledge that the woman of the house where you are lodging is a great sufferer, or is supposed to be,—I have heard she is almost doubled up with it; in fact, unable to get beyond the room she occupies, —acquainted with this, you will imagine my interest was aroused, and I thought I would make bold to ask one of her lodgers if the old woman is really as painfully afflicted as described, because I should much like to test the liniment, of which I am the possessor, in so severely obstinate a case of aggravated chronic rheumatism."

"Since you ask me the question, with no desire to be uncharitable, I yet am of the opinion, forced upon me by a circumstance of which I was witness a week ago, that Mrs Edred is not the cripple she would have people believe."

The proprietor of the embrocation looked grieved that a woman of her age should lend herself to assuming infirmity she did not in reality suffer, and he carelessly and with slight disappointment remarked, "Ah! then I will not waste efforts which might be directed in a more thankful channel. But you casually mentioned a circumstance—no accident, I hope?"

"Not at all. Every one was out except my sister and myself. We had indeed been a little way shopping, and I suppose we were unheard when we entered. Anyway, when I came down ten minutes afterwards—my boots are not new, and make little noise—I passed Mrs Edred's room, where the

door was ajar, and I saw her upon her knees actively engaged in repairing the floor; a curious occupation, I thought, for one so conspicuously afflicted."

Apparently the stranger did not see it in this light. There was quite a benevolent sparkle in the somewhat sinister-looking eyes while he replied, "I don't know: all my experience goes to prove the severity of extreme attacks to be intermittent—that is to say, there are intervals of freedom from pain; periods when the patient is capable of exertion and of engaging in the domestic avocations. We ought to think as well of this poor person as possible, if only for the sake of those terrible seasons of suffering which we believe she at other times endures. But I am keeping you—an unwarrantable liberty, knowing your time to be valuable, and pressure is so bad for the heart! Be careful with your constitution now you are young, sir, and when you are old it will be careful with you. Good-bye, good-bye, and many thanks!"

With emotion—the outcome doubtless of his philanthropy—the inventor of the embrocation hastened, after a twining serpentine fashion, along the irregular street, and disappeared just as Merry Tattergast entered the irregular dwelling-house. The doubled-up Noeba Edred sat crooning beside a fire whereon a saucepan simmered. She looked suspiciously from under her knit brows at the young man as he passed. It was an evil and doubting look bestowed upon all alike; it denoted war—contest for territory, defence of property, defiance to aggression.

He went up the crooked stairs four at a leap, and with a glad face entered the little room where slight and slender Jessie, his thoughtful housekeeper and loving sister, awaited him with devoted eagerness. He seemed to have been so long away that morning. "Back again, my lady-bird, and I have brought you some good news." Her face brightened. They were earning so little. The lace-making was badly paid for, and required such delicate work on her side; and the employment he accepted—such as law-copying, envelope-addressing, a tenor ballad at the music hall, playing the organ upon Sunday at one of the lesser places of worship, circular-

distributing, lending a hand on board the yachts; aiding some cabinetmaker overdone with work, and whose workmen failed him when service was urgent; light occupation at hotels, where large dinners needed extra hands, and where the popping of champagne-corks set his blood boiling; a *rôle* in modern comedy at the theatre, when the uncommon name of Tattergast was exchanged for that of Smith; pencil-drawings sold to the print-dealers, lessons on geology at the middle-class school, a day or two at the nurseries of the florists, driving one of the Ramsgate vehicles when the regular man was laid up—anything, just as it came—was so precarious—yet he accepted all with a zest and pleasantness that were surprising in so idle and worthless a being! Truly his face was his fortune; for without as much reference or character as would cover his little-finger nail, he contrived to pick up something or other whenever wanted; and the resolute principle of refusing nothing, and accepting all with a good grace and undeviating cheerfulness, was of more service to him than would have been irreproachable testimonials allied to a spirit of discontent.

"Tell me all about it, Merry?" she entreated, catching something of his sunny temper, and reviving on the instant.

"To be sure I will, directly. And my little one must put together our bundles and prepare for flitting. Briefly, Jessie, I am engaged by the immortal Dobson as lecturer-in-chief to his unrivalled exhibition, now open in Canterbury, and to be shifted next week to that charming place, Tunbridge Wells, where I have always been afraid to go owing to its ultra-respectability; but as lecturer to Dobson's, I presume one is qualified to appear in any select resort whatsoever!"

A few more words, expressed with due seriousness, put the matter in a plainer light, and Jessie became gradually aware of a real advance in their fortunes. She abhorred the uncertain in the matter of gaining a living; her whole childhood had been poisoned by this fungous order of existence. To see ahead some certainty—a fixed weekly wage—had long been Jessie's dream of the nearest release from care. With warm anticipations of some little freedom from worry, the girl

bustled about in order to get to the station in good time. Ten minutes sufficed to place ready for removal such poor belongings as they took about with them. They went down and paid the woman of the house the little sum owing, and then walked on quickly to the railway. Mr Dobson was pacing up and down the platform, with hands behind him and a quick eye on the alert for anything; he was quite prepared to be disappointed, but still hoped to catch sight anon of the gentleman of happy temperament. When Dobson saw him—graceful, careless, good-looking, untidy, obliging, frank, a degree cynical, yet altogether so honest, with his mild ingenuous manners—he felt regret for the distrust, and greeted him with cordial pleasure. Mr Dobson looked upon Jessie with kindly prepossession, admiring her exceedingly, and thinking that if her brother stood out about her not appearing in public, it would be a deliberate injustice to all parties.

With reassurance and a supremely confident air did the public caterer enter the fine old city. The bells were ringing, and Dobson walked with his two in tow as though the bells rang out in triumph. Yet nobody knew Dobson with all his importance, or bestowed a glance upon his pilgrims. The good people of the city were too absorbed in their own importance to notice that of inferior beings. There is no nonsense whatever about Canterbury; it is wholly and solely wrapped up in its conservative, genteel, and handsome old self. No one less than the resuscitated à-Becket would ever startle the reposeful dignity of its township, or thrill its worthy burgesses to warmer enthusiasm. Whatever the excitement in the outside world, no such unhealthy influences affect those of Canterbury proper—those decorously imbued with the calm distinction of living within its walls. Sightseers, and they of the lighter and more frivolous provinces may come here to stare about them, and criticise with audacity which thrills the blood of the man of Canterbury—may bring hither their sport and company of gay companions—but it is apart from and independent of the grave and prosperous citizens.

And this was the audience to appreciate a quiet and refined entertainment like Dobson's! Possibly to appreciate the efforts

to instruct and amuse of the gentleman about to make his *début.* Mr Merry Tattergast held small veneration for archbishops, or he might have been impressed, and have suffered from modest nervousness, upon the delicacy of discourse beneath the shadow of the eighteen saints, nine cardinals, ninety-four archbishops, twelve lord-chancellors, and four lord-treasurers, this famous see has yielded the Church and State. He looked down to the lovely girl beside him, so fragile and unprotected, and thought more of her. Perhaps the many well-dressed ladies and young girls, whose lines had fallen in so different and so pleasant places, moved him by the contrast. It was a responsibility he experienced; a sense of how utterly she leaned upon and looked to him for everything.

* * * * *

Mr Tattergast and his sister had barely quitted Ramsgate half an hour when the medical philanthropist presented himself at the threshold of the den where Noeba Edred abode. With the usual suspicious scrutiny, peering up from below her pent brows, she searchingly examined the individual's appearance, while he curtly inquired if she had lodgings to let. Apparently the uncouth mistress of the house did not notice any especially disagreeable mark about his appearance. She informed him two rooms vacated that day were at his service. He engaged them, paying a deposit, saying he should want them a month or thereabouts. He carried a hat-box in his hand—a battered old chip hat-box—and directed, went up to the Tattergast chambers, where he looked fondly at himself in the cracked looking-glass. A diminutive serving-girl, who might have been put together of bits of brown rope off the craft alongside the shore, and of other *débris* of unclean *marina,* came to the door and squeaked—slightly alarming the new lodger who had not heard her approach, and who seemed a degree nervous in this quaint old domicile—she would fill the water-jug! She did so. It had a hole where a large rivet once secured the handle, and the pitcher emptied itself without loss of time; but the lodger was taking minute phrenological inspection of the serving-maid, and did not observe the flood. When she had executed her duties and departed, the man

softly washed his hands. He removed from his pocket a large silk handkerchief; it was of black ground, covered with large white spots: he wiped his hands on this, afterwards passing it over his forehead: he next, with a pocket-comb, divided the hearth-broom head of black hair, which so closely resembled the article that it would have been no surprise had a variety of cinders been discovered clinging to it. There was an evident understanding and affection between himself and Jediah Lufkin, for he continued smiling to him fondly in the glass. Something may have pleased him, for once he nodded to Lufkin with a very shrewd and satisfied air. Having adjusted his circular head-piece quite to a smoothness in accord with his notions of personal symmetry, he carefully took from the hat-box a hat of broad brim and peculiar formation. He might well be careful over it, for there is not a doubt if damaged, there would have been no replacing the curious construction. Withinside this was written: "Jediah Lufkin, Utah." A mysterious inscript to the ignorant, but the enlightened believed the man a Mormon; and indeed, if taxed with it, he admitted himself to be a Mormon agent on a visit to the Gentiles, whose land he travelled upon business. What the business was Jediah Lufkin knew better than the Gentiles.

Thus when he went down-stairs Jediah Lufkin presented an eminently persuasive exterior—a rounded unison that was ingratiating. Some beings seem composed entirely of angles, spiky all over, pointedly bristling, unequally preponderating corner-ways. Mr Lufkin was not of this division; he partook more of the pebble than of the flint: was even everywhere: a placable sphericity: doubled up, he would have revolved for ever. He stood in Noeba Edred's door-frame, and it was astonishing how like one of the round-cheeked plausible old Dutch studies he was. The most distrustful of misanthropic anchorites would scarcely have drawn in horns at contact with this smooth creature. Noeba Edred looked up and nodded with brusque rough civility, and as though the civility were drawn up by a twinge of pain.

"A stranger in the land, I'll be thankful if you'll direct me

to the shore!" She grumpily told him the way, he observing every article in her room, with its space and form, especially in the region of the flooring. He did not go when she had told him.

"A guide-book is of service to the roamer," he said, with suavity; "it informs while it points out objects of interest. Don't want to trouble you, friend, but maybe you have one of some sort?" Then Noeba Edred spoke out with another twinge—

"It's no good a-coming here for information, nor for books, for there's neither one nor t'other. If us could afford money for buying o' books, I take it I shouldn't be living in this tumble-down old place, where it's more than a mortal can do to keep body an' soul together, not to speak o' the aches an' pains!"

Yes; he admitted the times were hard, and people unfeeling. He had been greatly shocked to see how badly the poor were cared for. He knew America well, and thought in America the poor were better cared for than in England, but wasn't sure; they had a precious disagreeable time of it everywhere! And, with a friendly nod, he went out for his quiet walk about the town.

After he had gone Mrs Edred chuckled, drew her huge old chair round afront the fireplace, and fell to calculating. What with dates of years far back, and amounts of moneys of one kind and another paid in and paid out, the calculating occupied the best part of an hour; and when Mr Jediah Lufkin returned with a small parcel in his coat-pocket, bought of the ironmonger, he saw his landlady asleep and the fire gone out. Instead of proceeding straight up-stairs, Mr Lufkin put one foot softly forward within the grimy chamber of his landlady, and then another, advancing with due regard to the peaceful sleeper, whom he would not have disturbed on any account. Mr Lufkin's proceedings were singular for a medical professor, if not for a travelling agent, since he might have represented a carpet house. Anyway he went upon hands and knees, and began cautiously to turn the ragged and dirty floor-covering away from the sides of the room, taking carpenter-like inspection

of wainscot and boards; so far as was possible without noise did he turn up the carpet, finally noting the landlady's position before the fireplace with a sarcastic grin to himself, and going on up-stairs immediately afterwards. While these were creaking beneath his tread, Noeba Edred, without moving, simply opened her eyes—bright twinkling eyes they were when she liked—and she curled her pinched lips contemptuously while muttering to herself, "I thought as much!"

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Mr Dobson conducted his auxiliaries to the Dane Hall, at the time the chief interior for entertainments within the walls of Canterbury. The hall seated eight hundred persons. It was generally well attended, and sustained a *prestige* of its own among those dependent upon the public for patronage. It was a plain building of the severe type: it is probable its founders, in conjunction with their architect, were of opinion that it would be out of place to adorn Canterbury with the representative, its archæological examples rendering all innovations or introductions intrusive. It was well appointed at the platform end: a proscenium, opening fourteen feet by seventeen feet, of plain but appropriate design, with heavy sliding curtains, and footlights, coloured revolving shades, lenses, oxy-hydrogen jets, and the customary apparatus incidental to the round of travelling entertainments. Mr Dobson of course possessed his own paraphernalia, and initiated his new coadjutor in the mysteries of Panorama exhibition.

While the men were talking and making the commotion natural when two clever ones of a sex come together, one to learn and the other to impart—while they talked and made much noise, lengths of the scenery were gliding duskily along; to the fore of it the rows of unoccupied seats could just be seen in the semi-dark and semi-daylight aspect, and glimpses of an old grey wall through the one uncovered window;—while this was the surrounding, there stood at the end of the platform, a motionless figure, as though one of those painted statues supposed to be in niches at foot of the proscenium, perhaps looking interestedly on, perhaps lost in a strange reverie that

was, like her life, half in light and half in shadow — there stood Jessie, looking so singularly, so sadly pretty, that Dobson jumped down, brought up a dingy crimson chair, with a number tied to its back, and gallantly offered her one of his best reserved seats.

"Well, Miss Jessie, and how would you like to stand and court the applause of an indulgent public?"

The piquant face looked merrily from under the simply trimmed rustic hat, and she replied, "I'm afraid I should have to wait a long time for it, Mr Dobson."

"I don't know so much," said Dobson, reflectively. "However, your brother objects to it, so it's no good giving the question consideration, or else you certainly would come in with admirable effect in my 'Bruges market-place' as a boat-girl of the Rege, or in my Ghent scene as one of the flower-girls of the Marché au Vendredi: don't forget the name of the square, Mr Tattergast; splendid picture, that! I paid Palette, the eminent scenic artist, fifty pounds for a hundred feet of canvas. It's them old houses; haven't been myself, but I suppose they're wonderfully like, and the antique architecture comes expensive!"

They had shifted the canvas while speaking, deftly unrolling the dim shadowy picture, which glided before the young man until he was, as it were, in a dream. The ancient square came back all in a flash of sudden and blinding pain; he seemed to be standing again under the shadow of one of the old poem-like dwellings, while a voice softer than they of Ghent talked musically of the fine Counts of Flanders, whose pomp clings as a legend to its precincts.

Mr Dobson tapped brusquely but with pride on the painting with his dirty thumb-nail, and repeated, "It's said to be wonderfully like!"

"Yes," said the young man, as one speaks when coming out from a dream, "it is wonderfully like!"

The Panorama-man thought him struck with admiration, and plumed himself, complimented; the girl sitting in the faded crimson reserved seat noticed the transient depth of thought, and did not suppose it admiration; but then she

knew nothing of the pomp of Counts and their old-world cities.

"Well, I think I shall get along capitally!" cried Dobson, rubbing his hands briskly; "adds to your value, young man, having travelled!"

"Yes," answered the other pleasantly, having recovered himself; "it adds immeasurably to an orator's assurance to have spent a few idle hours in countries and towns he professes to be familiar with."

"You see, that was where your predecessor was so deucedly clever. He'd never been anywhere, but would describe to a flaw in a brick or a notch in a pole. I well remember when my Italy was running—four years ago, sir—the rogue was with me all that time—he described to a rivet where one of the gondolas had been repaired after bumping against the piles of the canal! Ah, he was wonderfully graphic, he was!"

The new lecturer smiled. "I feel some timidity in attempting to interest an audience with my plain gossip after so accomplished a narrator."

"Now don't you apologise, Mr Tattergast, until there's occasion; and to tell truth *I* used to feel slightly timid sometimes when he was going on at his best; the schools are sharp now-a-days, and check us where inaccurate. But suppose we go and have a bit o' dinner; the young lady looks a little faint? What say, my dear? You'll tackle a plate of beef-steak? My customary fare, Mr Tattergast. A man gets his value for his money; no bone, and plenty of good tough eating! So come along, and lay a foundation for to-night."

They went along, and laid the foundation, although not, so far as his new acquaintances were concerned, of beef-steak, which neither of them entertained a partiality for. They went down a little in Mr Dobson's estimation at that, the worthy man limiting his respect for people to those who could masticate steak with a gusto; he failed to understand how to the finer palate the fare was barbarous.

After excellent refreshment of another sort, having a variety of business to attend to, but not wishing to fetter his companion on the first day of their connection, Dobson advised

a walk about the city. "Your sister will like to have a look at the shops!" And thanking him, Merry Tattergast and Jessie set out exploring.

By wide streets and narrow streets; by old houses, many of them historical; by grey towers, and remains of ancient walls—they did not look in the shop-windows, but went by quieter ways, talking, more interested in one another than in anything round about. The presence of the mighty fane near by sobers. Jessie had a beautiful depth to her nature, thanks to the tender training by companionship with that good mother. The influence so many feel when on hallowed or memorable ground was fully felt by the girl. Her companion, noticing her mood—possibly a degree affected himself—dispensed with any idle chatter; and when they had wandered away where meadows secured still greater quiet, he, walking through high grass, its little kissing rustle the sole noise, looking shyly into his companion's eyes, asked, "What is my Jessie thinking?"

"Chiefly of being your Jessie, I think!" she answered honestly, with a proud, pleased, grateful, and altogether modestly becoming smile.

"You are a dear little girl; please God I may be worthy your love. I could but contrast our vagabond, wandering, scarcely respectable selves with the ultra-select folk we passed just now, but I thought I would not exchange with one of them to lose my Jessie!"

"Did you, dear?" looking with large loving eyes at his open candid face. "It was good of you, very!"

"Well, my girl, I've been knocking about a long time restlessly, I won't deny, with many a flirtation hither and thither. I think the night I met with you I had been wasting time and words over the chance acquaintance of an hour; but from knowing you all seemed distasteful. I saw the fool I had been; your youth, innocence, purity, gravity, loving and grateful refinement, were different to the usual manners of your sex with whom I had met; and I thought if you could really love me for myself alone, since no possession nor position was mine to recommend me, I thought there

must be some good in me after all, for I was certain you wouldn't love what was bad!"

"I hope not, Merry!"

"No; and from then I plucked up wonderfully! Poor enough, goodness knows, I yet seemed all at once rich as I ever wished to be! Look you, I don't think I ever did a mean or a dishonest thing in my life; but I resolved with tremendous resolution to work so hard for you, at any mortal thing, and I have done it, and been happy doing it, and always shall! I mean so long as you are looking up to me as you look up to me now."

"You know that I shall always do that."

"I don't know; you are so young, and you do not realize yet *how* hard it is for a pretty girl to preserve an unspoiled love for a poor careless Bohemian, with nothing but his honesty to recommend him, not even a name like any other young fellow. What the dickens would you feel like if addressed as Mrs ——"

"As Mrs ——," she said; for he paused, confused, and she, confused, there left it.

"As Mrs Tattergast?" he exclaimed, with a plunge.

"Proud, dear; proud as the Queen of England!" And a happy smile sunned the young man's expressive face.

"Well, you certainly are a good little girl; and if you go on making me the same kind and thoughtful sister you have thus far done, I dare not predict the treasure of a wife you will prove."

A deeper glow tinted her cheek as they continued their walk, happy as could be; total sum, current coinage, in their pockets, threepence-halfpenny. But it was astonishing how sweetly the birds sang round about Canterbury—how fair the landscape looked.

And when, some hours later, this young man stood before the goodly audience, making the hall look quite another place, his address and delivery, with its wise and witty impromptu subject-matter, were so felicitous and so buoyant, the impression caused was a decidedly happy one; and the proprietor congratulated himself upon having acquired a

valuable fellow-worker. He had provided him with a dress coat and the necessary gear of an evening lecturer, and it must be confessed Mr Tattergast presented no unfavourable appearance.

"Much obliged to you, Mr Tattergast, for having done your part so well; adds to the intellectual value of my entertainment, and commends it to the attention of the thoughtful; it will do us good. Pray accept this half-sovereign as a mark of my appreciation of your services."

Mr Tattergast took it to his pleased young charge. "All for you, dear; the first result of our engagement!"

Red were the cheeks, while the pretty head drooped; then with exquisite coyness she put up her cheek to be kissed.

They obtained quiet and clean apartments—the very opposite of their Ramsgate retreat. And when the two had done their little shopping, and were sitting down cosily, it would have been difficult to discover a happier pair under shadow of an old cathedral.

"I wonder how poor father is?" She so often thought of him although saying little.

"Pray don't allude to that respected gentleman! I don't want him to turn up and claim my treasure, for a long time to come at least!"

"It is not likely," she said calmly; "such events occur in the story-books, but seldom in life, I think. And I—I should not be content to leave you now, Merry!"

CHAPTER III.

SYMPATHY.

If not a club of the first magnitude, the Sheridan was undoubtedly representative, and essentially comfortable. Its slightly Bohemian flavour did not detract from the respectability; and if not exclusive, it was yet preserved eminently select. True, it was not favoured by aristocratic members, and was not the rendezvous of any particular political or literary coterie. It aspired, however, to a higher influence—that of unfettered genius, no matter the groove of genius—and, above all, unfettered!

No Decimus Burton, Nash, Barry, Smirke, Parnell, or Basori designed the Sheridan. Its façade was unimposing; its entrance uninviting; its grand staircase did not exist; it had neither vestibule nor lobby; it was destitute of private reception-chambers; its servants were not of a magnificence of genus peculiar to the leading houses. No; it was rather quiet, home-like, and altogether quit of the formal; a retreat for the arts, and a refuge for the letters; where no one could experience a sense of restraint, and everybody seemed on friendly terms with one another.

Many of its members we shall not meet; those with whom we cross paths are described herewith. First, feel introduced to Peter Paul Potter, the serious artist, held in veneration at the Sheridan, a power in historic art, a disciple of pathos: are not his children of beheaded kings known wherever painting is appreciated; his queens in prison the soul-moving themes of innumerable canvas treasures; his martyred saints the admired of a particular school? Ay, and is not this the Peter

Paul whose wife left him, taking with her his children for his cruelty to her and them? But this does not intrude upon the province of art—nor must the man be judged by himself at home! So long as the world gains those pathetic children, those regal women with sad faces, those saints' heads moving us to devout feeling, it is not to be inquired into whether or no their creator knocks about the few indifferent mortals of his household, nor would it be seemly to ask his domestic creed.

Peter Paul Potter commenced with animal studies, even took a trip to the Hague, to examine with awe the grand, sullen, stolid "Bull." He painted a drove of beasts. The critics could make neither head nor tail of them. And the cattle-dealer would send no more of Peter Paul Potter's beasts to market. Perhaps the transition was a natural one—he turned his attention to the slaughterous scenes of history, painted some horrible things; a certain school liking the utmost blood and thunder possible, purchased Potter's sanguinary work. He was a young man then—with years came wisdom. He painted no more of these; created far loftier types; and made a reputation: the long period of fame which won for him the veneration of the SHERIDAN, and kindred assemblies.

A gentleman of advanced age, of jerky and slightly unpleasant manners, yet possessed of a brusque dignity that impressed the younger men. With hair almost white, lying untidy as a thatch, and a face that was lined and creased, and hands singularly restless as though not regulated in their movements by a mind, but acting on a spirit of independence and contrariety. This was Peter Paul Potter, the serious artist.

Rupert Redland, a poor student in philosophy; kept poor and of low estate by studies he hoped would one day make the world the richer. It was something of a mystery how this poor young man obtained the *entrée* to the SHERIDAN; really it was through the influence of his uncle, Oliver Redland, once held in much esteem in scientific circles, but at this time wretchedly off through following a certain hobby, which was tantamount to the pursuit of alchemy. The old romantic quest

in a dingy London back street may sound incongruous, but Oliver Redland knew what he was about, and the united scientific professors of every nation under the sun would never have turned him from his course. It had beggared him as it beggared his forerunners in the dark days: it had reduced him to skin and bone: it had alienated friends, caused men to look on him as upon that much-to-be-avoided being—the eccentric: it had blighted the life of his boy, Nephew Rupert, whom he had reared, and whose young years had been supported on the alembic and crucible: it caused neighbours to look askant and believe him in alliance with the devil, as they far back in the ages believed of others who practised rites and formularies popularly supposed to be those of necromancy: it filled close rooms with sulphurous fumes that drove out the light of God's good sun, and the freshness of God's good air: it plunged him into debt with the chemists, and compelled his boy Rupert to go excuse-making and shift-dealing to an extent that was revolting to him: it made him irritable and trying, to live with, cross-grained and saturnine: it burned and singed, and scorched and scalded, and maimed and bruised this inquirer into properties and investigator of the occult: and it threw life upon a die, one of larger import than they gave credit for who charged him with wasting days on shadows, and stupidly forsaking the bulwarks of science for the marshland of myth and fancy. Yet did Oliver Redland know perfectly well, gloatingly well, sanely and deliberately well, the object absorbing his whole thought and to which he had devoted his life. The transmutation of baser metals into gold? Not at all! The nefarious traffic in false coin? No! Redland would have descended to nothing of the kind. It was simply a pursuit of discovery; research was at the bottom of it all; the deep and subtle belief of years was embodied in the patient investigation: for Redland, man of science, scholar, abstruse thinker, was not the man to cast ambition and all the hopes of a life at the feet of any vain chimera.

Now, having a tutor of this order to mould his youth, it will readily be conceived that Rupert grew to be a thought-

ful young man; a trifle moody, as though always looking on the ground for something wonderful, or expecting at any minute to be confronted by the weird. Other gentlemen of the SHERIDAN, thinking, perhaps, there was not too great depth in any of themselves, did not dislike the peculiarly deep qualities and characteristics marking their compatriot. Generously losing sight of his poverty, the wealthiest of them were proud to take him by the hand. Genius ruled the roast at the SHERIDAN, and this Redland had brains, as the success in his studies testified. Apart from which the name carried a *prestige*. Long before the uncle shut himself out from professional unity with the philosophers, he was known as one of them, most honoured and depended upon; and circles of the *savant* had not forgotten nor ever would forget the good service rendered to science by their friend Oliver Redland. This was why Rupert Redland, the man with shiny elbows, greasy hat, and often rusty boots, was received at the SHERIDAN and thought equal to the best.

Theodore Lute, a composer, highly talented, and held in particular regard for his delicate ballads heard in all drawing-rooms. His pieces may always be known by the richly embossed and ornamented character of the covers. People with no ear for music said the cover was the chief value received; when they had obtained his pieces at a liberal discount off the half-price, this was uncharitable. Theodore Lute's compositions were characterised by much elegance. Not so brilliant as he in his ardour imagined; but they were catching and sweet, lingered upon the memory, and, undoubtedly, were in high favour with the lovers of choice ballad-music.

Theodore Lute had a very pretty sister, who possessed a finer knowledge of music than her brother. Although not gifted with the power of composing, she sang with extraordinary clearness and melody: thus his ballads and songs obtained a but too favourable interpreting, and it was no wonder that he loved his own work after this dainty rendering.

Etta and Theodore lived with their honoured mother in a spacious residence at Highgate. The house was the property of

Mrs Lute. During his lifetime her husband, a man of refined tastes, had been careful, far-seeing, and provident, and at his death both wife and children were provided for. The home was a happy one; care passed the gate and went elsewhere, and sickness never caused anxiety beneath the roof. The mother, her comely cheeks tinted with sufficient colour to bespeak permanent health and absence of all anxiety; Etta, at this time between seventeen and eighteen years of age, and whose pretty features were always glowing with her enjoyment of buoyant spirits and fervour; and Theodore, a tall young man, fresh-coloured, with deep blue eyes, susceptible of very tender expression; one glimpse was sufficient to indicate health and spirits of the happiest. Theodore Lute was considered handsome; certainly the contour of head and brow was eminently refined, and if the general indication was one of delicacy, the moulding by intellect and genius imparted a power masculine and distinguished. Theodore Lute was much liked at the SHERIDAN: his amiability was proverbial, his generosity had been tested by many.

Mrs Lute's villa was approached by a carriage-drive; the grass border was always kept evenly short; shrubs made the garden shady and picturesque; and two or three trees grew by the iron railing. It was a low-built pretty dwelling, the ladies whereof bestowed pains upon making the windows chaste with silk-lined curtains of lace or net from their own fair fingers, and baskets of choice flowers here and there. Two quietly genteel serving-maids completed the establishment: they had been with their mistress many years and loved her with honest devotedness. Once each year the family and maids went to Tunbridge Wells, and, later on in the season, to Bournemouth, where they always occupied the same residences, reserved annually for their coming by the agents.

It was the eve of their departure for Tunbridge Wells, and Etta was tying some favourite rose-trees to their stakes. In the calm sunset the distant view of London came out fine and clear; nearer, a charming bit of Highgate, like a landscape seen in an oval mirror. The girl paused at her work and looked admiringly around, while from the drawing-room

casement opening to the garden came the sound of Theodore's rich voice, trying over some of his latest ballads. As she stood thus amidst rare colours, with the glow from the sky lending still deeper hue to a complexion exquisitely tinted by the perfection of health, Etta Lute presented as lovely a picture as one would well wish to see; like her brother, she had splendid eyes, these wistfully yet happily looking forth on the picture were such as no painter could ever have caught the true beauty of; anon they lighted up with a deeper glow, when Theodore stepped lightly into the garden, still merrily singing his lay.

"And how are the roses?"

"Lovely! I wish I could take them with me. We always go away just when my flowers are sweetest."

Her small hand was as one of them, while she caressingly twined them together, Theodore singing in reply from Scott—

> "'The rose is fairest when 'tis budding new,
> And hope is brightest when it dawns from fears.
> The rose is sweetest washed with morning dew,
> And love is loveliest when embalmed in tears.'"

"Pray do not talk of tears; you have veiled the rich pleasure of that distant picture."

"I hope not; rather would I hang your life with roseate picturing, and make days, from dawn to moon-rise, glorious dreams."

"You spoil me! What should I have done without my brother?"

"Whose life has been made happy by having your dear self to cherish! Rather, what should I have been with no fair sister? I meet with men who have no one to greet them at their going home with tender welcome; none to pet them, and sing them songs in rose-world. Not long since my heart throbbed while a young man shook me by the hand gratefully, murmuring, 'God bless you for those kind words! I am in bleak, cold, and loveless ways, with never a voice to speak tenderly to me, or a heart to feel glad when I come.'"

"Dear Theodore! But what had you been saying to lead to that, if I may ask?"

"Oh, only speaking of you—your beauty, perfection of voice, goodness, and devotion to your brother; and I said, 'Would I could find you a sister like mine, Rupert, and you would require nothing else to live for!' I felt a little sorry I said it—poor fellow! He is dreadfully sensitive, so tender-hearted; but I never saw him thus moved before."

A large stone vase crested with blue flowers was near Etta Lute, and leaning her elbow thereon she became almost statuesque; while with grave trembling utterance she said, "Why not have brought him home with you for a little music and a quiet hour in the garden? It would have cheered him. I feel for your friend."

"Ever my sympathetic humane one, angel-like, ready to lighten the burden of the heavy-hearted! You should have a fair destiny before you, Etta, for you are skilled to comfort, formed to encourage. It is not in me to do very much save sing, but all I have done is owing to your inspiriting example; you would animate to heroic endeavour any one with great things in them."

"Thanks, dear! Now you shall have my Duchesse d'Orleans as a reward for saying such pretty things of me." She cut for him the richest of her roses, and with playful gentleness placed it in his coat. How lovely she looked while thus engaged! Within their elegant drawing-room a lady watched them with fond pride, and tears, which will come as much for joy as for sorrow, filled her eyes. She arose, and with dignified bearing joined her children in the garden. Theodore ran to bring a chair from the breakfast-room, and then a Shetland shawl which he was always careful to gird about his beloved mother after sunset. She would smile at the thoughtful attention, feeling so well as scarcely to need it, but submitting with passive and gratified tranquillity.

Mrs Lute held in her hand a letter. "Cousin Masheter is at Tunbridge Wells, Theodore, with Mary. I thought very likely we should meet them."

"Is Mary better?"

"No; still about the same. They have taken her chair with them, and of course Wilson, faithful fellow, accompanies them."

"I am very sorry for poor cousin Mary; she has been a great sufferer."

"Her papa has spent a fortune in endeavouring to procure her relief; wealth will not always bring release from pain."

"She is a sweet girl," said Etta, affectionately, "and I am glad she will be there while we are."

"I hope we shall hear some good music at Tunbridge Wells," said Theodore.

"Mamma received a paper to-day, and the only amusements announced are a lecture on Ritualism and the approaching visit of a Panorama, to open in the town on Monday next."

"Not a strong bill," said Theodore, laughing.

"My dear children, you do not go into the country for amusements; we have enough of those in London."

"True, mamma; but some good music does pass the evening very pleasantly."

And the mother gave in to them, as she always did, with the loving amiability distinctively hers.

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CHAPTER IV.

AT TUNBRIDGE WELLS.

"COBHAM MASHETER, Esq., and Miss Masheter, the Herongate, Suffolk."

One might read this announcement amongst the arrivals without gathering aught concerning the Masheters, or what the Herongate chanced to be; and they would not be likely to meet with people who knew them and could explain to friends who these said Masheters were, and what their social status. It was known they had brought a chair with them, and that was thought an odd thing, since there were invalid chairs to be had for the hiring, good enough for even the Masheters, whoever they might be! This was the lodging-house line of argument. The lodging-house was much put out, although five guineas per week should have bespoken consideration.

In quieter watering-places the visitors are discussed and criticized with an interest unknown to the large towns, and the people with nothing better to do inquired of connections knowing Suffolk if they knew the Herongate. No; never heard of it. Most of them were of opinion it would be better not to inquire into it with too much energy, as it might only be the name of some small white-fronted villa. But a day or two after the appearance of dignified white-haired Cobham Masheter upon the Parade there came to the spa the three Brothers Tomkins—popularly spoken of in their own county, Suffolk, as the Great Tomkins Family—and these knew all about the Masheters, and very soon enlightened their neighbours after this wise: Cobham Masheter was a gentleman of

good family and considerable property, residing at an old hall called the Herongate, about seven miles from Ipswich. Mr Masheter was a widower with an only daughter, a confirmed invalid, aged at this time twenty-four. Yes; they thanked the three Brothers Tomkins for so much, but then they must know why the young lady was a confirmed invalid —in fact, they could not sleep until knowing what was the matter with her. The three Brothers Tomkins were happy to oblige again: Miss Masheter suffered from a severe spinal complaint, the result of an accident many years ago. They were grateful indeed to the Brothers, and then went in search of somebody who knew all about the Great Tomkins Family, in whom they felt deep interest, and would so like to know a little about them. Yes; they found this useful informant in the person of Mr St Luke Lillingston, a gentleman of unequivocal gossiping powers, and who would chatter upon the fertile subject of the Great Tomkins Family by the week together. There was advantage in this, because, as the gentleman pertinently remarked, "The Lillingstons had done business with the Tomkinses for generations." From this gentleman's account, then, it appeared that Mr Adam Tomkins had been a corn merchant in an extensive way of business, Mr Seth Tomkins a large coal merchant, Mr Noah Tomkins a famous agricultural implement maker; each of the brothers having realised a fortune had retired, and they resided together a little way out of Ipswich, where their money had been made. The Brothers Tomkins were bachelor gentlemen, and exceedingly polite and agreeable. Yes; they were deeply indebted to their well-informed acquaintance Mr St Luke Lillingston, and hurried off to try and discover man or woman who would disclose what this Mr St Luke Lillingston really was. They hoped he was all right; but there was a something in the name—you know a man called after an evangelist certainly ought to be of unexceptionable integrity and morals. And quite by chance they came upon a being—he didn't come from Ipswich, but he knew all about this Mr St Luke Lillingston—and from this being, a Mr Percy Eugene Venn, they ascertained that the other being of

whom he told was a gentleman of independent means, was married, and was blessed with a large family of sons and daughters—did not know how many, but believed a Miss or a Master Lillingston would be found in nearly every school in the kingdom. He had frequently hunted with St Luke Lillingston, and knew him to be an exceptionally nice fellow, and so on.

This was enough for one morning, and was rested upon, the better to digest it. And really it was all astonishingly satisfactory: the people were of substance; it would be safe to be seen interchanging courtesies with any of them. That dear girl, patient darling, they so pitied her, and thought her papa so noble-looking. Those kindly-featured gentlemen, the Messrs Tomkins, how plainly were benevolence and genial feeling stamped upon those honourable countenances!

But the day after, the conversation took a new turn, partly connected with the Masheters, nevertheless. A fresh arrival stirred the interest. It was rumoured the prettiest girl that visited the Wells was again to be seen, and the young men lounged to see. It was pronounced by all who had admired her the year before, that a year had improved the beauty at that time very striking. Miss Lute became an object of warmer interest. Even the casual visitor could not forget her name. It was an uncommon name; something musical about it they thought; a classic sort of surrounding that was eminently poetic. Altogether, the girl was a study.

Presently this fair girl was seen walking by Miss Masheter's chair, while the good-looking young man, understood to be Miss Lute's brother, walked on the other side, Mr Masheter and the lady-like Mrs Lute bringing up the rear. It was considered that when Miss Masheter's upturned gaze was resting upon Miss Lute's face, the expression was profoundly beautiful. It was known the Lutes were people of substance. It was definitely decided that when Miss Lute's downward gaze was resting upon Miss Masheter's face, the expression was supremely touching. And the girls being both of substance were the cynosure of favourable notice.

Even the Brothers Tomkins looked on the skew, and with

grave propriety addressed one another, possibly relative to the interesting group.

The Brothers were very much alike; tall and thin, scant iron-grey hair, sallow complexions, solemn of manner, as weighted by the responsibility of for ever representing the Brothers Tomkins. They wore Oxford-mixture suits, gloves, scarves; wore white hats with black bands round—white for coolness, black for gravity; mourning rings, one on each little finger of each right hand. They did not mourn for anybody; never would mourn for anybody, unless a Tomkins: but the mourning ring was decorous, as were also the ebony sticks each leaned upon. No idle twirling thereof in the lime-fragrant air: these gentlemen had made fortunes by close attention and strict adherence to business, and there was not the shadow of a twirl about any of them. Very harmonious was the agreement between these business men when they arranged to reside in company, an agreement properly drawn up and witnessed, while it was severally signed. It was to this effect: During remainder of their days they would live together. Whichever should depart this life in advance of the others, his wealth was to be divided between the remaining two; the finally surviving brother would become sole possessor of the wealth of the other two. The Brothers would not entertain for a moment the possible question of either of them entering upon the matrimonial state; such a bare and incongruous notion was unworthy a clause. Nevertheless, by the advice of their solicitor it was inserted, to the effect that whoever engaged in matrimony would rank as defunct; wealth to be confiscated, the unmarried becoming the possessor. The agreement was not public; like family matters of more private import, it was strictly between themselves and their solicitor. Nobody else knew of it; and in Suffolk as elsewhere, the Great Tomkins Family were held of great account. People who did not know them very well, never could quite make out which was Mr Adam, or detect any difference between Mr Seth and Mr Noah; and indeed considered them so very much alike that if the Brothers were shaken out of a sack

they would have accepted the one that came first as Adam and allowed the other names to follow afterwards. The Brothers Tomkins were reputed to be very benevolent; really, they gave nothing away; their mild beneficent manner and august meekness countenanced the rumour. Peculiarly charitable at heart — especially to one another — they submitted to be thus generously spoken of, and loved their race, acutely.

Just about the time we conduct the reader to this place, more excitement than usual was astir, owing to the advent of a beauteous lady of regal associations, about whom some mysterious talk was afloat.

The visitors were walking up and down and chatting, reclining upon the seats listening to the music, looking in the windows of the shops, waiting about by the well. A glorious morning, the sunshine bringing into relief the quaint houses with their ruddy and brown colours, slanting down through the odorous limes, tinting flower-garnished balconies, making of the promenade a tasteful representation of the select and the affluent.

The Brothers Tomkins walk arm in arm; they always walk thus abreast, as though unwilling to trust one another out of each other's sight. They walk pliantly erect, with a straight look ahead; but they have each a peculiar half spring with their walk which raises them all up together, like those little figures children play with, the apparatus of which opens and closes upon scissors plan. It imparted an undulating action, not graceful, nor jerky, but consonant with the rhythmical locomotion dear to the Brothers Tomkins. Mr Seth, as was proper, according to their appearance on this planet, walked between Mr Adam and Mr Noah. It was impossible to distinguish much difference in them: the same sharp nose pertained to each, the same coldly calculating eyes that seemed to belie that benign cast worn upon the thin faces when in public; similar hats, the acumen of properly adjusted black upon white; each right hand carried an ebony stick and an Oxford-mixture glove; the arms of the three interlaced protectingly. The Brothers seemed

enjoying the beautiful morning, and looked with mild beneficence upon the gay throng passing and repassing them.

Lustrous and bright as the goddess of morning, Etta Lute, with her brother, sat below the trees much entranced. The band was performing a medley composition in which, however, the young composer recognised one of his own melodies. As usual, Etta was robed with simplicity. It was a quiet family, relying upon no order of decoration, and least of all did this fair creature need the advertisement of effective clothing. Perhaps her parasol was the most elegant portion of her morning gear, but that was because Etta could not wield the heavy, hideous, morning sun-shades; the love for such is an acquired taste, and this slender symmetrical girl had not acquired it. With playful observance Etta watched the people walking up and down. The Brothers Tomkins had scarcely passed and amused her by their simultaneous movements, when her attention was caught by a lady of singular beauty, who, although dressed in French mourning of the costly kind in vogue with those of the upper circles, appeared so unconscious of being attractive, either by reason of personal loveliness or exceptional richness of robing, it added to her charm of manner so much that the beholder was fascinated however insensible to female attractiveness.

"Such a woman," thought Etta, "must have been Marie Antoinette." And indeed the lady possessed many of those traits of delicacy rendering the resemblance faithful, in so far as we can judge and fancy, of the superb Austrian. Tall and queen-like, with infinite elegance and sad repose, and a poetry of mien, the expression of soul, not art. She was unattended, but her servant in livery waited at the foot of the steps where the promenade commences. Etta was greatly interested. She addressed a person sitting next her who, robed in crimson, and apparently sculpt from an enormous beetroot, presented an opposite effect.

"Can you tell me who that lady is?" The woman turned, and with civil warmth, informed her fair neighbour it was "Mrs Jones of Putney, well be-known to the County court." This was horrible—her Antoinette suffering the indignity of a

County court!—There must be some mistake. "I beg your pardon—I meant the tall lady in mourning." "She!" cried the lady of colour,—"a good many would like to know who she is; thought you meant t'other woman with the sun-flower in her hat! Ah, it's a age of mystery, that it is, and much it's altered sin' I was a gal! Such a person as that, then, there wasn't; and as for all these new-fangled light-shades of hair, saving your presence, present company respected, I believe they're all false—nature don't tint them hues, and never will! But what the people see in *her* to come here, and watch for every day, I've never been able to understand! You'll see presently the music nor nothing won't keep 'em here; as soon as she's gone they'll clear off like one o'clock. She just walks once up and once down, and then sweeps on to her carriage followed by her servant; what he be stationed there for every day is another query, though I've heard, in case of the crowd pressing upon her Highness and discommoding her!"

"Her Highness!" echoed Etta, aghast.

"Bless you, yes! Nothing less than that, and mighty proud the Wells people are of it! She's said to be a Princess of Spain, but, as I understand, not any too well off."

It was true that the lady won general notice; that the well-bred withdrew slightly that she might pass without being pressed upon; that many took seats in the shops purchasing trifles for the pleasure of a critical inspection without a breach of good manners; that those who had been idling about with laughter and pleasant chatter were quiet and observant; that the marvellous reposeful grace, so majestic yet so condescending, dwarfed the elegance and fashion there assembled; that the sunshine appeared to weave a crown of its rays for this Princess who by beauty was entitled to its honour. It was all true: the Princess Zenaïde did walk upon the promenade for a few minutes each morning, did place her servant where described, did drive on unnoticing any, did enjoy the humiliation of not being very well off, the (to her) strange procedure of shop-people who required references to substantial English traders elsewhere before accommodating

her with their gilt-lettered red or black books. The Princess's money, owing to disturbances in Spain, was not realizable for some little time; her establishment, therefore, was maintained upon principles of economy. The Princess aroused interest. Her credit was good. It was so reasonable. Every one knew of the unhappy disturbances in Spain. Great sympathy was expressed for the Princess, lovely, unfortunate. The Prince slain, probably. Not young exactly, but with grace that eclipsed youth; and if not precisely in regal circumstance, or owning anything of an establishment, the books were paid for at the end of each month; and, after all, paid-up books is *the* passport to respect.

Her Highness had walked to the end of the promenade, and was turning to retrace her way when she came face to face with three individuals whose souls, perhaps not attuned to regal rank or womanly dignity, did not prompt them to display that extremity of respect shown by some of the company, or possibly they were ignorant of the state of the person they were face to face with. Two men and a girl. A good-looking young man, of singularly happy expression, and an easy and careless air that sat very well upon him; a pretty girl, young, of engaging appearance, albeit poorly dressed; a portly genial man of middle age, wearing a white vest upon which gleamed a large mock gold chain: it was the great Dobson and party. Dobson carried a bundle of bills in his hand which he left at the shops or handed the company at pleasure. Dobson handed a bill to the Princess. The spectators were horrified. The tradesmen of the boulevard turned white. The music was disorganised: the trombone had been feasting eyes upon the illustrious lady and this outrage shook the trombone to its centre. But great was the astonishment to see their royal patron deign to touch and take the horrid piece of paper, and with gracious word of thanks pass on. Her eyes had been bent upon the sweet little face of the child-like sister of the disciple of happiness. But Mr Merry Tattergast was not so much taken himself by the Princess; true, he flushed slightly, but then his eyes were upon Miss Lute, at whom he was gazing with some admiration.

The Brothers Tomkins were passed by the Princess. The little spring was more marked, they all three went up suddenly and came down sharp, the peculiar eyes of Mr Seth looking each way at a brother as if to watch the effect of the superb appearance upon the protecting outsiders. Mr Adam caught the look and replied with one of august and grave sorrow that a lady so calculated to be suspected of alliance with the *demi-monde* should have trailed past and so close to them. The Brothers Tomkins were not in any sense to be thought of with those who are impressed by any such order. Mr Noah would have caught the glance on the other side but that he happened to be busy; Mr Noah was employed in defending himself from the chance gaze of a doubtful-looking girl, one of a decidedly disreputable party of Bohemians, who ought not to have been allowed on the promenade. Thus between the doubtful in this manner the half-spring was active with protest while alert with cautiousness.

"Very mixed company, Brother Adam?"

Mr Adam looked virtuously down on the Oxford mixture, and with the tone of authoritative opinion natural to the man of many eminent qualities, he answered, "From what little I have seen of the company, Brother Seth, it impresses me unfavourably."

Mr Noah thought perhaps if they were to sit down, they would be more out of the way of the people jostling them.

There was an abrupt semi-revolving movement, a pause, the Brothers marched to a seat, and sat down as by clockwork. And it was a grim watchful trio, with all the benevolent play of feature.

Note the grave demure little bodies passing, deep of colour as from having been much in the sun, dressed in steel-hued alpaca of eccentric design (they make it up themselves, and conform to decency rather than to fashion); if their faces are brown they are kind, and you may depend they are maiden aunts of some little trots whose faces brighten at their coming, and who, thank God! do not look at the cut of one's garment before yielding the love more fragrant than the scent of these odorous limes. Neutral shades, unexceptionable greys, still,

deep-toned, hueless, expressionless, self-satisfied and placid aspects; eyes, robes, manners, speech; these are the human songs without words: one looks upon them and thinks what nice quiet people they would be to have in at one's last moments,—no noise or naughtiness there. Some may tire of the dull faultless repose conveyed, of the appearance of being just taken out of whitey-brown paper, of the absence of slang and nineteenth century vulgarity, when the boudoir and the mews are akin, but such as these lack appreciation of worth, and close their eyes to the virtues. Why, even the Brothers Tomkins are not cynical before these, hear Mr Seth's comment while they pass; "Some women there got money, I'd stake my word! Don't you think so, Brother Noah?"

"Same idea occurred to me, Brother. Eminently respectable!"

It is a mixed company, composed of the representative classes of wellnigh all the watering-places; for Tunbridge Wells is a convenient distance from town, and the flitting hither is from many quarters: and two who have met cannot forget one another, the lady known as the Princess, and that poor little girl of the Panorama.

CHAPTER V.

BOGGIS AND BLIM, SURVEYORS.

Two gentlemen, seated in a dingy office that helped to make a grim London Street more grim, were talking earnestly upon matters of more than usually grave importance. The gentlemen were old partners, of long and disreputable standing; professing to be land-surveyors, but the precise nature of their business was never sufficiently clear to be defined with exactitude. A plate, from which every vestige of brass had long since vanished, bore the titular sign,—

BOGGIS AND BLIM,
SURVEYORS.

Which was Boggis and which was Blim, or whether either or neither was Boggis or Blim, remained a speculation. Those old dusty window-frames had not been painted within memory of man; two steps leading to the passage, on the right of which was a door bearing OFFICE, were of the greenish drab which indicates alike absence of cleaning and sparseness of traffic. The surveyors' interior was not of a description to warrant a desire for close intimacy with the owners. None of the residences and offices of the street were remarkable for cleanliness; some of them were worse than Boggis and Blim's, but the firm certainly enjoyed pre-eminence for dirt amongst the surveyors of Middlesex. For all which they did some business, were often away upon this business, when their clerk, Timothy Figg, was left in charge; and, as a rule, Mr Figg acquitted himself to the satisfaction of his not over-par-

ticular employers, the satisfaction of the public, who did not go to Boggis and Blim's, and the satisfaction of himself; for possessing a sincere desire to get on in a capital business, he devoted much careful research in the learning thereof, so far as it could be gained from the old papers of Boggis and Blim.

Timothy Figg was an original of pure finish. There was nothing crafty or sneaking about this young man, who would never have done to play the *rôle* of the stage-fag of a lawyer's office. Openness was upon the face of him; his great vacant eyes opened with the broad innocence of those of the seal when it looks up, dog-like, dreamy, with meaning, had one the key to it, but as it is, unintelligible: his flat expressionless face might have been cast in the Lowlands; his wide mouth, always open, was conspicuous for broad white teeth: his hair, long, thin, and tawny, was pushed back over his ears; these were utilised, like the shelf in a small parlour, for the storing of everything that came in his way that could possibly be lodged, rested, stuck, or hung thereon. Mr Figg's skin was the colour of the straw-hued blotting-paper used in the office, and as porous. A humid, unbaked, gutta-percha order of being; not half the fool his employers imagined, nor so crafty as we might represent, did we entertain sinister designs in relation to the young man.

The approach, and the guardian of the approach, being thus made clear, dispense with ceremony, and join the firm.

Mr Boggis is seated at the office table, busily turning over papers which Mr Blim hands carefully from a small drawer, cunningly contrived to fit at the back of a larger drawer of an old-fashioned bureau, the most considerable piece of furniture to be seen in the office. As Mr Boggis thus leans, intently engaged upon referring to the papers, an idea may be formed in the rough of as unprepossessing a gentleman as surveyorship yielded. A keen, cruel, unfeeling man, designed by nature for a broker or bailiff; risen from the dregs; of low animal propensities; merciless; bent now upon a stupendous enterprise, and until now in shallow water—jobbing work—unimportant except in so far as it would aid dishonest clients to beat fair-dealing adversaries over some question of land or property.

The services of Boggis and Blim were always to be secured for any more than ordinarily vexing question; and to such as would be likely to employ them, their address was invariably known.

As Blim stands in front of his partner, it might well be thought that while Boggis represented low, coarse, cruel, hard nature, the other stood for the incarnation of astute and wily cautiousness and subtle ability. Blim was the better-read man of the two; and as a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, Blim's considerable store was risky as an arsenal to approach near to.

When the papers were handed and duly arranged, Blim sat down.

A dirty buff blind was pulled to a level with the wire—nobody could see over or see through on account of the ninety-nine years' dirt, but it was a custom habitual with the precautious Blim, who would never mount the gallows for lack of care.

The door was bolted, a baize curtain drawn across it.

"Now," said Blim, comfortably, "it's all right, and let's see how near we are to becoming millionaires." The other became red in the face, his ferocious eyes glittered hungrily, his hand trembled as with palsy.

"It's an awful work," he muttered; "an awful prize!"

"It would be a glorious piece of business did nobody but ourselves know of it; but, according to our authority, no end of parties are posted up in its existence, and I cannot doubt are engaged in similar inquiry."

"Well, let's begin at the beginning—summarize the facts."

Mr Blim in a precise manner detailed as follows: "A Treasure, known as the TREASURE OF BOADICEA, was long known to have been buried somewhere in Suffolk. When the warriors under the Queen of the Iceni were repulsed and the fortune of war went against them, the Queen despatched two with directions to bury the whole of her treasure, which at one time, until her palace was despoiled by the Romans, was considerable. This she recovered when, placing herself at the head of her tribes, she besieged Camulodunum (Col-

chester), and slew the garrison. But she was afterwards defeated. Her entire treasure was again cleverly hidden from the Romans. Knowledge of it was handed from father to son, and held in solemn observance out of reverence for the great Queen. Then, when memory of her heroism, of how she vanquished seventy thousand Romans, and burnt London, and did much else brave in the sight of her kingdom, had become dulled by time, one of those vassal's descendants, given to monachism, and a follower of Dunstan, thinking to found some order himself with wealth, disinterred the Treasure in the year 954. Dunstan, hearing of it, and being a chief worker in gold, joined fortunes with the man, and when the prelate founded the monastery at Glastonbury, elevated him to some dignity. The Treasure continually increased until it was threefold its olden value, still, from some cause or reason, preserving for the sake of distinction its old title. When Dunstan assumed the regency of this kingdom, it was yet further increased by revenue and tithe. The Treasure helped the archbishop to power, and private sums went to swell the Treasure, most likely from motives of superstition."

Mr Blim paused, and turning over some papers, afforded opportunity for remark.

"The Treasure was a big one at *that* day," said Boggis gloatingly, and with a tone of voice suggestive of how much more so it became as the centuries revolved. Mr Blim merely nodded, and having found the paper next in order, continued: "The secret was jealously guarded by the only two persons aware of its removal; but when, under Ethelred, the archbishop lost his influence and literally died of grief, with a touch of the same superstition he entreated and commanded that the Treasure should be returned to its hiding-place, fourfold. This was done by the same agent instrumental in removing it. Dunstan left a missal where in Latin all this was described. The missal was sealed and intrusted to his friend and co-keeper; and was not unfastened until the reign of Richard I., when the then possessor of the secret thought well to go to the Treasure of Dunstan and take from it a portion for the advancement of the Crusades. It was an officer of

King Richard's Court, and the advance was made in the shape of a loan. Had there been no Treasure of Dunstan, it is probable there would have been no Crusade by Richard; and there is no doubt the man who thus made use of it believed he was treating the Treasure and the Church with respect. He accompanied the expedition, and was foremost in the field. You are aware Saladin, the brave Sultan of Egypt, was defeated and died at Damascus; great treasure was appropriated; and when that of Dunstan was replaced, it was largely augmented by a division of the gold and gems of Saladin. So important was the bulk of the accumulation, its owner of that time did not again disturb it; and for one hundred years it remained untouched, when Roger Bacon, the scholar monk, who seems to have found out everything, discovered the existence of a fabulous treasure, and having discovered its existence, devoted himself to the research. Either by his science or other agency he did discover it; but, singularly enough, instead of removing it, or any portion of it, he, on the contrary, adopted the hiding-place for the adding thereto of great treasure of his own. It is probable the philosopher conceived the project of extending life beyond the natural term, and imagined the extraordinary wealth would be useful to him. It is more probable that Bacon accepted the storage-place for such worldly wealth as he possessed while subjected to the fierce persecution that at times assailed him. Anyway, the Treasure of Saladin was added to, and that is the principal thing!"

"Certainly!" approved the other partner with greedy relish, adding, while noting upon paper as he wrote, "Boadicea! Dunstan! Saladin! Bacon!" With self-satisfied and unruffled coolness the other proceeded.

"Nothing was added to or taken from the Treasure for two hundred years, when Thomas Wolsey, who was born near by (in the town of Ipswich), and who was descended from the companion of Dunstan before mentioned, would appear to have been the only person aware of its existence. It is probable, being of a learned turn, and given to poring over ecclesiastical Latin, he somehow came across the parchment

whereon the strange history was recorded; or he may have gathered an inkling from tradition handed down, and which from long time became obscure and mere rumour, only credited by a few. This Wolsey was sharp enough to discover it, and to keep his own counsel. You know the man's history?"

"No, I don't!" grumbled the less-informed Boggis.

"Well, he rose to great power in England; had the king under his thumb, in fact!"

"Wish I had!" muttered the other, rolling it like a sweet morsel under his tongue.

"He became more wealthy than the king himself; his retinue and revenue exceeded in its costly magnificence that of any sovereign in Europe."

"And book-larnin' did that?"

"Undoubtedly, united to a superior sort of impudence!"

"I can muster the latter; the former licks me. But go on."

"As is usual with these high and mighty ones, pride had its fall. Disgrace and reverses came rapidly—not so rapidly, however, but the Lord Cardinal was forewarned in sufficient time to secure the best of his valuables and chief of his money-bags. Himself and a faithful servant deposited them with the Treasure of Dunstan, it being intended and planned, if affairs did not take a turn for the better, to quit England for the Continent, taking the entire mass with them. Thus, in the year 1530, the Treasure had increased at the least by one hundred times its original value!"

"I s'pose it would!" Mr Boggis rubbed his hands with slowly meditative pleasure.

"And there remained. The Cardinal was taken ill and died at Leicester Abbey—and a very good thing for us, say I."

"I should think so! That is, if we get it; and being land surveyors, we ought to understand a little of the proceedings necessary."

Mr Blim laughed cunningly, as much as to hint there was not much doubt of it. "But the Treasure hadn't yet increased to its full, for a grandson of Wolsey's faithful servant became the personal attendant upon King Charles I.; and when that monarch was in difficulties through his enemies, acquainted

him with the existence of the great Treasure, and pressed the king to avail himself of the extraneous aid afforded by its means. Charles might have adopted the valuable suggestion, had not events rapidly involved him in so serious a dilemma, that it became for the time impossible. He did the next best, and, as I consider, a very wise thing—deposited the private jewels and the larger share of realizable funds, with an explanatory manuscript addressed to his son Charles, in that very secure repository his betters before him had derived convenience from. To quote with the accuracy characterizing our memoranda generally, I should say the afore-named devoted attendant deposited that nice little addition."

"Don't matter who, so long as they were put there," grumbled Boggis, who was not particular upon close detail.

"I don't know so much. These precious servants seem to have done the principal part in it all through. There was *serviens, servire*, I serve; not a man Jack of 'em had gumption enough to filch the lot."

"We won't blame 'em; there wasn't the demand for ready cash there is now!"

"But don't it strike you as a queer thing, that that bulk of jewels and gold was left undisturbed, save to add to it, for centuries, and is there still, wherever 'there' may be?"

Mr Boggis looked up with a scared expression. "I hope to goodness there's no mistake about it: you see we're in for its discovery or—ruin; and when a respectable firm takes up with a big project of this kind it's a serious matter."

"There's no mistake. Let me alone for that. And I believe it's in Suffolk. It'll pay us, in my opinion, to go over every rood of the county."

"You see, if we were the sole owners of the secret it would be worth no end of time and trouble, but it's uncertain how many are at the same game."

"We must take our chance with other people. I do think, looking at our experience, very few stand a better chance; it is known to us, as well as to others, that about the largest treasure ever yet discovered is hidden above ground or below ground somewhere, we believe—our data points to the infer-

ence—below ground. We likewise see no reason for supposing the original Boadicea hiding-place has been improved upon, that was in Suffolk—*ergo*, our research may be confined to that interesting county."

"Agricultural, you mean," dolefully commented Boggis.

"True; but I don't think the chest or chests, if it happens to be thus secured, would be likely to be stowed under any plough-track."

"I don't know how long it is since that woman's day, but it seems to me the plough goes over a good many parts she nor the others would expect it to."

A noise was heard without, and both started as though galvanised. It was merely Mr Figg cracking a Brazil nut; the firm looked at the expressive countenances of one another and were reassured. Then Boggis said in an equable tone of voice, "It's wonderful! And to think it is in our power to possess ourselves of the whole treasure-trove, eh?"

"That isn't all!"

Boggis became ghastly as Blim stolidly concluded his estimate; it was three or four times larger than even the avaricious partner had calculated. "In the reign of George I., one Saul Weir, the wealthiest director of the South Sea Company, joined with others in raising the shares from £100 to £1000: when every person almost of any property was speculating in the magnificent bubble, this shrewd and clever Mr Weir not only chanced to net and retire in good time with the largest sum realized by any one person, but by singular coincidence came to know, by natural descent I believe, of the Treasure. Now, mark you, instead of having it out, uniting the moneys, and living like a prince, he became a confirmed miser and money-lender; he doubled his South Sea fortune, sir, and then must deposit it with the other; and when he died alone and untended, his only son, with whom he had quarrelled, was earning an honest independent livelihood elsewhere, and knew nothing of his father's death."

CHAPTER VI.

PRINCESS ZENAÏDE.

In the drawing-room of the villa in the occupation of the Princess, her Highness gave audience to Pierre Antoine Gaspard, a Frenchman.

This person had the management of her estates, produced revenue therefrom, transacted the necessary business pertaining thereto, and salaried himself out of the proceeds. M. Gaspard presented an illustration of the clever Frenchman developing into the cunning Spaniard. He was specially adapted for the office he held: his skill as an accountant was only rivalled by his ingenious diplomacy, while his tact as an overseer was only equalled by his perfection as a liar. From his head to his heart, M. Antoine Gaspard was a consummate courtier and thoroughbred scoundrel.

"You bring me bad news?" The Princess was standing at her most queenly height, with her hands clasped behind; the splendid profile came out very finely cut, while thus stationed between the dark-skinned stranger and the light. She stood by the window, a fall of lace curtains about her, a pink silk blind, part-way down, shedding a delicate hue upon her face and lending additional radiance to the superb hair; she was in mourning of Parisian fashion, and of unusual elegance even for Paris. "Very bad news, monsieur? I have been anxious, but prayed the Virgin my forebodings at your delay might not be realized."

His face grew darker; sitting however, unmoved, he replied in guttural monotonous tones, "I remained in the principality until the last moment to ascertain whether things took a more

hopeful turn. The alcalde before whom the banditti were arraigned has pronounced judgment, but since they were in alliance with the gitanos it has not checked the depredations. The vineyards are devastated, and olives perishing; the grain, owing to the drought, has failed; arable districts ravaged by the hordes have been despoiled of their flocks; and, as my unwilling advices informed you, the silver-mines have been working low."

"You are indeed the ambassador of ill. An exile and beggared, fortune frowns upon me sorely. The Cortes—has no special consideration of my affairs occupied its attention?"

"The claims of your Highness are not recognised. You are aware the Chamber of Deputies is opposed to the representation?"

"To my cost. And the Senate?"

"Disputes the hereditary dignity it is the privilege of your Highness to grace."

"Now, on my soul, but this is pretty! And the gallery—my paintings, wealth in themselves——"

"Are confiscated."

Her southern blood flushed hot, and with withering scorn she asked, "And my son, the Prince—confiscated too?"

He bowed his sinister-looking face, while replying with suave civility, "The actions of your son, the Prince Sebastian, have not been controlled in any way."

"And no alguazil has dared to imprison the boy? Forbearance, truly!"

"He has not been removed from the College of Santiago di Compostella. I have visited the Prince regularly as you desired."

"My thanks. I will have the boy with me here in England. If our hopes are so desperate, we have well bid adieu to our beloved land." Her eyes filled with tears, and the voice was very tremulous. She crossed to a part of the room before which was a black screen, a prie-dieu was here, and for some moments she engaged in earnest silent prayer. Then she returned to where he was still sitting, impassive and unfeeling, and in a calm gentle utterance that would keep back the

sadness, she said in the language of her country, "La gente pone, y Dios dispone." She seated herself upon the couch—the usual hard, uncomfortable couch of a furnished villa—it seemed to awaken consciousness of her position. The lady of royal circumstance deprived of her means is in a more pitiable condition than a person in the humbler rank of life placed in similar position. And the grandee of Spain inherits pride with degree. To such an one, trouble, involving diminished state and contracted income, is a sore trial indeed. This high-born lady had striven to support with grace the misfortunes of her brief political experience, had borne banishment and the humility of the discipline by economy, had lived an alien in France and England, unmurmuring, and universally admired and esteemed, but she had not been prepared for so utter a wreck as had thus been communicated by her chief adviser. It was a terrible blow, realized all too swiftly, looked in the face unshrinkingly. And in the thick of it there was but one gleam of consolation,—her son, she would have the boy with her, would live in still deeper humility, nay, but she would keep him by her if she lost all else, and the further the world might be, the closer would he be drawn to her wounded heart. No woman is really poor who has her son left to her.

"I must trouble you to negotiate the settlement of the remainder of my affairs, and to arrange with my bankers for the transmission of the balance in my favour, after which I may no longer consider you attached to our service. There will be no necessity, and I may not expect to retain disinterested sympathizers when expenditure and establishment are reduced to the lowest ebb."

"Your Highness should command me, but owing to the death of a distant relative I have succeeded to a small independency—just sufficient to preserve me from the urgency of employment. I'm sure if I can aid by a small loan at this trying season, I shall still think it my greatest happiness to serve your Highness."

"Thanks, friend, no! Only to the extent I have asked, and you will kindly see my son off, with the comfort befitting his rank?" Her eyes were full of tears, she arose, and he under-

stood the interview was at an end. She could control her emotion no longer. Holding forth her hand, which he bowed over an instant with profound homage, she then retired.

M. Antoine Gaspard withdrew without more ado, bestowing a supercilious stare upon the tire-woman of her Highness, then conversing with the housekeeper by the dining-room door. The "companion" of her Highness next appeared, and passing these two, proceeded to her lady's chamber; it was a privileged attendant, confidential, and in all respects estimable: an Englishwoman of genteel connection, of education and refinement. The Princess Zenaïde valued the companionship of this person very highly, and trusted her implicitly; we cannot bestow more appreciative description than by saying she was worthy the touching reliance. Her pity was no mere mockery, fair-worded, false-hearted; it was deep, sensitively silent, yet betrayed by numberless considerate actions, that were inexpressibly grateful to the enduring Princess. Mrs Pomfret knew of old experience the visits of M. Gaspard were productive of intense sorrow to her beloved mistress, and she hastened to her chamber, there to attempt to console her under any new distress. She was admitted, and, as she feared, discovered the Princess had been weeping.

"Thanks for coming to me, I was wishing to see your kind face."

"I regret you have been disturbed again, dear madam; let me beg of you to sit down, and do not tell me of anything just yet." She took eau-de-Cologne and tenderly applied it upon the Princess's handkerchief to the delicate brow, hot now and throbbing painfully.

"My affairs are in a more intricate condition than ever; in short, I am deprived of all further source of revenue."

"Even a settlement this way will be better than the agonizing suspense you have so long been undergoing. Your Highness possesses the richer wealth of religion and resignation."

"It is hard, Pomfret, for a woman who has walked with queens to be brought thus low."

"I admit it; yet how far more lofty is the patience that will submit, than the contented enjoyment of regal prerogative!"

There was an interval of silence, then the Princess said,—

"I have sent for my son."

"I am glad of that; he should be with you; it will make both happier."

"We must leave this place, resort to some quiet country-town, where residences are inexpensive, and where we may exercise more strict economy. What will you do?" It was asked very anxiously: the Princess would have felt parting with this faithful confidant.

"Remain with you, certainly, if not displeasing."

"How good of you!" giving the other her hand; "no, it is not displeasing. Would I were in a position to reward such devotion. At one time it seemed uncertain if I should escape with my life; but that is left to me, together with those two boons of life, a child and a friend. Therefore I should be very cheerful." The sweet smile accompanying the words, so gracious, so winning, more than repaid the attached companion.

Widowed women these, of so different station, yet knit by one common feeling!

"Kindly let me see to-day's 'Times;' perhaps there may be some advertisement of a dwelling suitable."

The paper was brought to her, and she tremblingly scanned its columns. References to her country caused her sharp pangs. She turned quickly to the page whereon she was most likely to find that of which she was in search; and looking down its several announcements she thought this the best adapted to their need:—

> MEADOWFORD, Essex.—To be LET, unfurnished, a small detached VILLA-RESIDENCE, 1¼ mile from the station, and near to the Church of the Annunciation. Large lawn, well-cultivated garden, stabling, and out-buildings. This desirable Family Residence contains two large sitting-rooms and anteroom, five bed-rooms and dressing-room, and servants' offices. Rent very moderate. Cards to view, and all particulars, of Messrs G. & J. Hammer, Auctioneers and Estate Agents, Cheapside and Meadowford.

"You will write to these people for me, perhaps? I may also

trouble you to go and see it, you know so exactly the home required."

"With every pleasure. I will go and write at once, and inform you of particulars when they acknowledge my letter. I will lose no time in going into Essex when arrangements are sufficiently advanced to sanction it."

After Mrs Pomfret had quitted the room the Princess remained in deep reverie, and there stole upon it the image of that little face seen upon the promenade, and which she could not forget. There was something in those eyes that had gazed up in her face, hauntingly vivid; they seemed looking up at her still—large, beautiful, thrilling; they had pierced to her inmost soul; their expression lingered—it shadowed much deep feeling, much wistful yearning, a life all shifting and purposeless, with no grand womanly tie; and while this is lacking, all the love of the kindest of men still leaves some void unsatisfied. The Princess believed she had read something of this sort. It was quite out of the order to be so absorbed by the passing glance of a mere child of Bohemians; but she was very interested, and had it been more convenient would have had the child brought to her.

CHAPTER VII.

"DOBSON'S IS COMING!"

"DOBSON'S IS COMING!"

It was on the walls and hoardings all over the place, and the good people of Meadowford were curious in consequence. The fame of Dobson's had not travelled thus far, and folks anxiously inquired of one another, "Dobson's what?" They had a suspicion it was in the entertainment way; a conjuror or "magician," as he styled himself on the small bills, had caused the announcement of his approach to be made in the same mysterious manner. The people of Meadowford were too clever to be sold twice over anything; therefore they settled it that something in the amusement way was upon the road, and would in due time reach their appreciative town. We use the word advisedly. Meadowford is very quiet; there is little to disturb the even current or break the monotony of the country-town tranquillity; and to tell truth, any diversion of the kind is welcomed, and generally repays the proprietor who, not discouraged by a limited population, ventures to engage the Corn Exchange or Mechanics' Institution for his exhibition. Mr Dobson is travelling the Eastern Counties, is in Essex, is *en route* for Norfolk and Suffolk; Meadowford is in direct line, and without a doubt Dobson's is coming!

Few strangers are seen in the streets of Meadowford. Now and then a commercial traveller, who from often walking thronged pavements feels uncomfortable and stared at, and puts on a disagreeable air of cynical indifference which is unbecoming and not natural; for he is an easy-living man, and not in the least reserved—not sufficiently so for the poor wife's

sake at home, solitary in the small London rooms while he is on his journeys. And sometimes an auctioneer from London visits Meadowford, but not often, for the people about stick to their own tenaciously. Even on market-days the same faces are seen week by week round the cattle-pens and grain samples, and it is rare to find an unknown patron at the market dinner in the hotel. When a fresh individual does appear in Meadowford streets he is criticised to an extent that ought to last him for the remainder of his life. Thus when that, in every way, remarkable being, Mr Merry Tattergast, was seen walking down High Street, with the inimitable swing and good-humoured composure inseparable from him, it almost seemed to outrage the demure sleepiness around, and virtuous shopkeepers withdrew from standing by the glass-doors lest the being should speak, and neighbours opposite fancy there was connection of some sort. After living in Meadowford a number of years one becomes exceedingly particular, and studies decorum as much as one's business. It would be very damaging to be seen talking at one's shop-door to a rollicking person like that. Now and then Mr Merry Tattergast saw this sudden manœuvre. It did not ruffle his self-complacency; he was by choice or necessity without their pale of social respectability, and he was very pleased to have it so.

There were necessary preliminary arrangements before the advent of the Great Dobson, and the conducting of these fell to the lot of the valuable coadjutor. He was closely scanned, and the tradesman dealing in ready-made clothing sent his boy to stand by the door where pocket-handkerchiefs, smock-frocks, jerkins, and guernseys, and other articles were hanging, too exposed while such an uncertain character was about in Meadowford.

Through the wire blind of Meadowford Bank the head clerk saw the suspicious looking being upon the opposite pavement, and quietly instructed subordinates to examine paper currency closely before taking it.

A gentleman connected with the turf, lounging at the entrance of the White Hart, scanned the stranger with fra-

ternal interest, taxing recollection to assist a recognition of some sort, for the gentleman connected with the turf felt exceedingly dull in this calm land.

The one policeman caught sight of the Tattergast a long way off, and turned down one of the quiet ways to be conveniently removed from possible service.

Two old ladies going shopping (there were seldom more than two shopping at the same time in Meadowford) saw him coming, and crossed the road nervously, partly through the suddenness of that wild apparition, partly from the reckless driving of a man with a donkey-cart, which, although remote at the time, rendered the streets perilous; so, clinging to ancient reticules of green stamped velvet, they crossed in company and breathed a prayer at the kerb.

A serving-maid bearing a jug of ale passed the young man, and looked genuine country admiration; but meeting his merry good-tempered large-hearted expression and a mirth-provoking twinkle in his fine eyes, she laughed outright, then blushed and hurried on, displeased with herself, for she went to chapel and people were looking.

He had such a self-possessed manner, natural not assumed —so placid a philosophy, nothing ever troubled him or deprived his heart of the pleasure its own natural cheerfulness brought along with it.

Now although Mr Tattergast would have hesitated a long time before purchasing a glass of ale so long as the twopence would be useful to Jessie, there was yet one gratification he never did and never would deny himself, and that was a flower for his button-hole. He preferred Tom Thumb geranium, but if that was not to be had would buy something else, if he had the money; when this was not the case he would, with the unblushing coolness of a Theodore Hook, walk into the first garden that took his fancy and pluck a neat spray, looking all over the bed to find a leaf the size and colour he deemed appropriate. Thus it was not surprising if Meadowford people, who were uncommonly shrewd, detected the irregular about this person from his very gait and costume. Still Mr Tattergast's love of flowers

was deep-seated and not of an affected type, for he made no trouble whatever of wearing a dandelion or dahlia as convenience offered.

Walking on, his eye was gladdened by long low windows, and long low glass-houses stretching up a broad nursery garden; windows, houses, and garden resplendent with bloom. Over the shop he read

ROOT, FLORIST;

in the shop-window he read—

BOUQUETS CUT TO ORDER;

nailed on the first glass-house, the end of which faced roadways, was a board whereon he read—

GARDENS LAID OUT AND KEPT IN ORDER.

"Now Root," said Mr Tattergast to himself while opening the door, and in no way disconcerted by a terrific spring of the gong above, "let's see the most chaste cutting you can do at one penny!" The summons sprung at his entrance brought from a distant hothouse a portly, pleasant-looking woman, carrying a round basket and a long slender pair of scissors, wherewith some pruning operation had been proceeding.

"Morning to you, sir! What can we do for you?" civilly asked, while depositing her basket of cuttings on a heap of bulbs.

"Flower for the button-hole, if it won't be spoiling any of your choice blossoms."

"Maybe you'd like a rose or sprig o' heliotrope with hair-fern or love-grass?"

"I'm not over particular, but like a Tom Thumb as well as anything!"

"Do you, now? well, that's the difference in taste. Gentlemen in Meadowford don't wear much in their coats, and when they does has the quietest colours I can cut, I s'pose they think it's noticeable."

"Yes; one of the reasons why I like Tom Thumb. I've

ternal interest, taxing reco … from me."
some sort, for the gentle… … once it was
exceedingly dull in this c… … unconscious

The one policeman ca…
way off, and turned dow… … was standing one
veniently removed from … … musk.

Two old ladies goi… … them to human
than two shopping a…
him coming, and cros… … for the observation,
the suddenness of t… …wn, "Perhaps you'd
less driving of a n…
remote at the time … …et me buy my flower
ing to ancient retic… … He wished her to be
in company and b… …ay before taking the

A serving-mai… …houses. Mr Tattergast
man, and looke… …es, but never, if he could
his merry goo… … "This is the fortune I
mirth-provokin… …am; and perhaps you're
right, then blu… …Canterbury—she did not cut
for she went t… …or a bouquet under half-a-

He had suc…
—so placid a… …e to do it; she wouldn't cut
prived his he… …it. When my poor husband
brought alon… …one had to live on bookees,

Now altho… …man's donkey in the pound!'"
time before … …per the woman, who appeared to
would be u… …warmth of temperament of her
never did … …coin offered, and cut the best
flower for h… …for the young man who appeared
nium, but … …of the warmth of temperament of
else, if h… … Meadowford. After this was
would, w… …satisfaction, she, standing on the
walk in… …her hand to her mouth, shouted
a neat … …which surprised Mr Tattergast ex-
size an…
surpri…
shrew… …coming up the steps of one of
very … …she explained—

" Then to her man,—"Show the gentleman houses, Benjamin."

led off, the gentleman in his rear. Benjamin an orchid house, and the gentleman, not so used his head a smart blow on the top of the doorway, he looked up with a forgiving laugh, taking Ben- fancy at once.

ought to have warned yer the doorway was low, sir; you haven't hurt yerself?"

"I daresay I have, but my head is so hard from frequent knocking about, I really couldn't say. Fine show of plants here!"

"Our place is small; haven't the room for 'em; but we don't grow more nor we think we'll want. The place is untidy now, for I've bin taking a lot o' bedding-out and indoor plants up to th' Hermitage, yonder by the Church o' th' 'Nunciation; it's let agin, an' the lady, I s'pose, is oncommon fond o' 'xotics!"

They passed out by the door at the opposite end, and into another house; it was hot and faint with odours struggling one with another. Row above row the line of splendid bloom dazzled and confused with intricacy of colour; upon the lowermost level, ferns and ornamental grasses presented a tasteful border of green; and at the end, in an alcove of flowers, a girl was seated, daintily placing the fine stalk of maiden-hair ferns here and there about a bouquet of choice flowers she was arranging with much taste.

"For the lady's dinner-table," said Benjamin Balsam, nodding towards the bouquet. His companion was looking more at the face just above it, which, whether its delicate hues were flushed from the blossoms or came of her health and youth, was certainly beautiful. But then Tattergast knew as well as other people that beauty strikes one most when it is come upon thus unexpectedly.

She looked up at their approach without, however, devoting any particular attention to the stranger, asking her father to pass her some more blue and white ageratum.

"Pretty posy that, Mister! My rough hands can't put 'em

together with half such care." He was looking very fondly upon his daughter and her work; she blushed a hue deeper, deftly twining the binding-shreds around the stems.

"The girl's thoughtful this morning. She had to go up to th' house I told ye of, an' somehow caught sight o' th' lady, a bit o' fortin her father ain't had, and the sight a-turned her head,—a purty foolish child. Anybody'd s'pose you'd no seen one o' yer sex afore, Lil!"

The girl flushed hot, while she rather angrily exclaimed, "Well, father, it's no matter; I never have seen any lady like that before, so grand-looking and so beautiful! She does *not* seem a bit like the ladies we meet with every day."

Mr Tattergast thought it exceedingly probable the lady, whoever she was, came out in relief very strikingly, judging from the specimens of the sex he had seen in Meadowford, the pretty piece of humanity before him excepted. She was so in the midst of his favourites she might have been for her delicacy one of them, and he thought of her in a different category altogether.

Then it all at once occurred to him that Dobson had impressed upon him the duty of ascertaining the names and addresses of the genteel residents—a duty Mr Tattergast was not any too attached to: but here was opportunity of ascertaining one at least without going out of his way, therefore he pleasantly asked, "And what may be the lady's name who has so won your admiration?"

"Madame de Gonsalvo," replied the girl, with a fluency denoting the name to be familiar from frequent repeating.

"A foreigner?"

"Yes; but you would scarcely think it. She is very beautiful."

"Dark, of course; why, she must be Spanish!"

"I don't know what she is, except very beautiful; but not dark; clear complexion, hair of a rich golden-brown. Oh, to have such hair!"

"You have not much cause to complain, Miss Lily. I daresay some of the Meadowford girls wish they had yours!"

Benjamin Balsam gazed very fondly at the girl, who, confused, went on with her work. Seeing she was not pleased, her father referred to the Hermitage again.

"Meadowford folk don't like foreigners. I heard as how the chief maid had been down to Starch the grocer to say quarterly credit would be a convenience to Madame, who would have pleasure in dealing there on those terms. And Starch sent answer back as his connection was so large he didn't care to extend it for credit, but if a weekly settlement would suit the lady, his boy should call three times a-week for orders. Altogether, opinion seems to go agin her."

It only needed opinion "going agin her" to enlist this Bohemian's cordial sympathy, and he in turn was interested in the unknown and suspected. He was leaning in his usual careless graceful fashion, an elbow on a pot of bushy kalmia, its white waxen flowers on line with his handsome head, with its careless graceful curls, his bright and meaning eyes still watching the gardener's daughter at her work; and she looked up for the first time, being struck by something in his appearance attractive to her, and she looked down again, the shadow of a pleased smile lurking about the little mouth; yet there was a partially troubled expression, as though his image interrupted the reflection of her beauteous example of all queenliness.

"I don't admire Madame de Gonsalvo's choice of locality; I certainly should not care to live hereabout myself."

The remark hurt the girl. She had been born there, and her father had worked there from when she could hardly toddle to the rough embrace.

"If all on us liked one part," said Benjamin Balsam, philosophically, "th' plot o' ground wouldn't hold; climbers are as useful as perpetuals, and a hardy annual has its place if not side by side with the stove perennial!"

"Very true, Mr Balsam," said the wanderer, with cordial approval. "I'm one of the roaming ones myself, and I suspect shall continue to be till some good little wife ties me down to a hearth and home of my own." Then there flitted before him the picture of her he had left that morning—so good, so patient

so encouraging, so helpful to the making of a better man of him; and by that light it did not seem to be quite the thing to be standing there bandying thoughtless compliments with a very pretty girl but little older and little better off. He walked rather abruptly away, with a civil 'good morning' to her while looking down upon and trifling with the fancy grass bordering the ledge. Her smile died away, a slight expression of sorrow appeared for a moment, then that also faded, and she resumed her employment with intentness. They quitted the house; she leaned a little forward and could see them taking the path to the gate, then the young man passed forth, and her fingers seemed weighted; but looking up, the white waxen flowers met her eyes there where he had leaned, and that graceful idle attitude and happily contented expression came back like a picture, and the sunshine of it lent colour to the flowers and company to the loneliness.

Tattergast resumed his way. A brick wall beyond the florist's enclosed lavender fields; upon the wall bills were posted, as they do somehow get posted upon the most out-of-the-way walls of this extensively walled country of ours; —largest of the bills, and longest of them, he read with a species of nausea—

"DOBSON'S IS COMING!"

Then Mr Tattergast remembered Dobson had said—"Whenever you have an opportunity of bespeaking patronage for our exhibition, don't fail to call upon the gentry, and try either to get permission to make use of their names, or else to sell tickets for the reserves." Dobson had been very good to them, and Tattergast was more grateful to any one who treated Jessie with kindness than himself; he had moreover promised to do as requested, and a promise with Merry Tattergast, especially when ratified by a deep sense of gratitude, was binding. He therefore with audacity which was only equalled by its grace, walked in at the garden-gate of the Hermitage and up to its front door, where a lady-like person very quickly came to discover his mission.

"May I have the honour of speaking for a few minutes with Madame de Gonsalvo?"

"I fear not. Madame lives very retired, is not at home to visitors, and her business is transacted through me. May I inquire the purpose of your desire for the interview with my lady?"

He had spoken with gentlemanly manner and courtesy, and Mrs Pomfret displayed similar politeness, undeterred by the travel-worn appearance of the stranger.

"With pleasure, Madame. I am agent in advance to an entertainment known as Dobson's Panorama, a high-class, respectable exhibition, to which many of the gentry have kindly extended patronage. We also court that of Madame de Gonsalvo; or, if that be denied, the favour of your taking tickets will be much appreciated."

The amicable manner accompanying the words, which, unfortunately, is not to be fully understood in the reading, pacified the fastidious companion, who might else have felt aggrieved on the part of her lady; however, she, with every consideration, declined for her lady both favours.

"Pomfret!"

It was a voice proceeding from an apartment near, but what a voice! it thrilled the young man; he had never heard sound, note, tone, resemble it; and for the first time he felt nervous and uncomfortable, wishing himself away.

Mrs Pomfret apologized, and with immediate attention, proceeded to the apartment. She returned in a minute or two saying—"Madame will see you, sir."

He was ushered into the presence of Madame, and for the moment felt blinded. He did not recognise the lady who had attracted so much observation on the Parade at Tunbridge Wells; indeed he had not truly seen her before. It was the surprising beauty and majesty of the fair being that so disconcerted him, and sorely he repented his vulgar intrusion. The elegance of her recumbent posture, the costly nature of her robe, the blackness of which caused the radiance of her hair and delicacy of her skin to appear yet brighter and fairer, the languid splendour of her large drooping eyes, the proud cast

of features, and aquiline perfection of outline, the tender contour of mouth denoting kindness and condescension, the small white hand, slender, sensitive; the exquisite movement when her head inclined to his homage, these created an experience as different as possible to the ordinary. She noticed his embarrassment, and gracefully begged he would be seated.

"I heard you talking to my friend. I feel some interest in this. The young girl travelling with you is well, I hope?"

The young man was considerably astonished by this sudden angle, how to smooth which puzzled him extremely. With the utmost respect he replied that she was very well, remembering his fair querist was—of the Continent Continental!

"I saw her once. She impressed me affectionately. I should be pleased to see her again. If convenient to you when in the town call upon me:" again inclining her head as denoting the interview was at an end. Madame resumed reading, upon which she had been engaged when he came to the door, and the visitor retired with a sigh of relief, and a brain busy while walking in the direction of the Mechanics' Institution, at which temple of science and amusement he was shortly to address the enlightened public of Meadowford.

How that grand face haunted him! Somewhere in Italy—he believed in the chapel of the Palazzo Ambrose at Florence—he had seen a pictured head of a wondrous fascination, the pride of Benedetto da Maiano's altar-piece; and this stately and patrician, yet withal saint-like head that had recently bewildered his usually composed judgment, recalled the old chaste masterpiece; memory of this carried him back from England as memory of that had carried him back into past centuries, when art was a passport to immortality in every sense.

Regarding the mysterious prepossession of Madame he laid a veto on it at once by deciding not to inform his charge of what had transpired, and he determined to keep a sharp look-out during the time of their stay in Meadowford. This roving careless fellow had his feelings, and they were deep ones with all his assumed indifference—too deep to risk losing her, dear

to him as his very life. He was by no means fond of patronage whatever Dobson might be, and would take particular care it was not extended to the one being of all the world that loved him, if he could anyhow avert it.

Altogether his reception at the Hermitage had been a surprise.

"I have been in Meadowford exactly one hour," said Mr Tattergast to himself, "and it would be interesting to know how much adventurous experience may reasonably be compressed within that space of time. Here I have been generally criticised as a vagabond, treated with extreme kindness by humble growers of flowers, and admitted to the confidence of an emphatically queenly woman; and of it all I do think watching the arranging of a bouquet the sweetest pleasure of an hour!"

CHAPTER VIII.

RED AND WHITE.

JEDIAH LUFKIN patiently awaited his opportunity. As perseveringly did the old woman keep to that one chamber. Assuredly there was some strong motive at the bottom of it all. Was it hidden gold of which Lufkin had an inkling? No; it was an iron box, stowed away in safe concealment under the boards of that part of her room where she was generally found sitting. The box contained papers which a variety of people in one quarter and another were exercising themselves considerably about—papers that would, it was believed, communicate the hiding-place of a colossal treasure. This box the Mormon had determined upon possessing himself of. The problem of why this miserly and artful female should cling with such tenacity to the box of papers, when she might by a little trouble and judgment have secured the tremendous prize, and have lived for the remainder of her days with the affluence of a sovereign—this seeming inconsistence strikes one at the outset. But would not a woman of this nature rather hold greedy possession, all unknown and safely, than burden herself with a superfluity of wealth she would fear to expose and would not know how to enjoy?

Years back this woman had a son, who left her to seek his fortune in America. She was then confidential servant at an ancient dwelling-place in Suffolk, and remained in that position for a long time afterwards, during which she corresponded at regular intervals with her son, to whom she was strongly attached, and for whose return she pined stubbornly. After the death of her master she removed to this tumble-

down old place in Ramsgate, and still continued corresponding with her son until there was a break on his side, and then a letter briefly saying he hoped to push farther up the country to try for better luck; and this push ended it, so far as the correspondence was concerned, for he wrote no more, nor came. She could not, would not believe him dead; nor was he. She never lost faith in his some day coming back to her—rich or poor, and to this faith she clung tenaciously. Here is the solution of her strange conduct: to her son—loved with an ivy-like clinging unto the death—would she consign the secret that must at last insure his contentment with fortune in his own land. Opposed to this scheme was the accident of others being aware of the value of the documents in her possession.

The hard facts we have to go upon are these: an iron box of papers was hidden under the floor of an apartment she never quitted. It was known to the subtle person lodging above-stairs, who was resolved upon securing its possession: with this scheme Noeba Edred was acquainted, and was equally as obstinate in her resistance and subtlety.

One day a young man in the garb of a sailor, with a singularly bluff and honest expression, came to the door of the house, and with some hesitation and almost a tremulous manner asked the diminutive maid if Mrs Edred was within and was well. It was asked with breathless eagerness as it were, and the woman sitting in her room heard it, and her heart was stilled. She planted a hand upon either arm of her chair, raised herself, gasping, and strained her gaze upon the door. The young man would not come in; he only wanted to know whether Mrs Edred was still living; and when informed of this he had another question to put, eager, breathless, excellently done for a novice, with Jediah above leaning over the balusters impatiently awaiting the result. The woman was not to be drawn outside even by this crafty *coup;* with a ghastly mocking laugh she fell back in her chair, horribly disappointed, yet satisfied. No son would stand gabbling in the portals who knew his mother was within. Mrs Edred scored one more ruse to the credit of her friend above. Bitterly did she regret ever having written

of that within her possession; had that never been written this determined opponent would never have appeared to trouble her. As it was, all sorts of gruesome ideas floated in upon her during the long periods of sitting in her accustomed place. Might not her boy have shown or lost the letter, or perhaps it had been stolen from him; if so, it would be deemed sufficient prize to enter upon the speculation of a journey to England for. Sufficient prize! There had been no such prize since man first ran the race for gold—admitting those papers to have reference to the Treasure of Boadicea.

And sometimes grim imaginings flashed upon her concerning the safety of her son. What if, to make the purpose of the plot secure before this man started for England, some injury had been done her son—some deadly injury never to be found out, his fate to remain unknown, and she for ever expecting his return! These disagreeable musings added to her moroseness, and life at such times was exceedingly bitter to bear.

Upon a dull and rainy afternoon one of the magnates of the District Board and Sanitary Commission, as his paper handed in to her announced, called to inspect the drainage and other offices of Mrs Edred's dwelling. They had called before, and she surlily gave permission. The gentleman came in with due gravity, and wiped his shoes on the boards, begging pardon, and saying he thought there was a mat, coming in out of the daylight, &c.; he carried the long-shaped book familiar to all who love to study the belongings of the *genus* tax-collector; he was a civil-speaking gentleman, and went out at the back with quick measured strides—altogether a true municipal manner pertained to the person. Out back he discovered the water-butt oozing or leaking and running along the bricks and into the masonry; the water, said the sanitary commissioner to the girl, was injuring property, and he must assess Mrs Edred in damages; would she go and ask her to step that way for a minute or two. Mrs Edred returned answer she would take his word for it without coming out, as she was afraid of the draughts and damp. If they liked to send her a new water-butt it should be put in place of that in use, but she couldn't

be responsible with this, or that, for the way the sky water ran about; she thought the most satisfactory way would be for the authorities to erect an awning over her property. The old woman was exceedingly cross, not because she disbelieved in the commissioner, who nevertheless was false as Jediah himself, but she entertained peculiar objection to the borough visits, and invariably treated the officers in a short and sharp method. The gentleman went away, and it was after he had gone it struck Mrs Edred as curious that trickling of the water should be perceptible on a wet day; and then she scored one other designing branch of his indefatigable operation to the round-headed man.

Jediah did indeed apply himself with energy to the project he had in view. Schemes that might never have occurred to any English genius were thought of and carried into execution with system and promptness. He had money and cunning, he had resources and confederates, he had patience and perseverance, yet was held at bay by simple obstinacy and cunning that matched his own.

This went on until Jediah's patience and resources were alike exhausted, and he resolved upon a bold and dangerous expedient; to burn out the faithful watcher—to cause the flames to effect what his skill failed of accomplishing. This barbarous design he carried into execution.

It was about eleven o'clock at night when, dozing in her large old chair, Noeba heard a crackling noise, so close to her and so fierce it awoke the woman to an instant sense of awful peril—her house was on fire! No fact realized with terrible suddenness can surpass that of being awakened to the proximity of fire — nothing so paralyzes the energy. This woman started to her feet, listened with strained ears, stared with almost fascinated horror where long slim tongues of fire darted through the old wooden partition and shot upward, graceful, livid, white, red, yellow, playful with the foretaste, curling and coiling snake-like, lapping the wainscot, spreading broad to the wall even as winnowing fans, then belching forth furiously, the room and house filled with suffocating smoke.

Then was heard the rushing down and into the street of those who had come in for the night, and the shrill cry of neighbours, people on the right hand, left hand, and opposite, of "Fire! Fire!" and the hurried grouping of men and women; those of adjoining houses, taking their movable possessions into the street or to the shelter of some friendly and safe retreat near by. Noeba Edred had always borne a character for eccentricity; and her domicile was anything but in favour with the neighbours, most of whom had been expecting something of this sort a long while—either a conflagration or a tumbling about her ears of the quaint old building; and most of the neighbours—those at a safe distance—thought it would be a very good thing.

Through windows and walls shot the flames with lurid fury, sheeting the squares and front with shifting fire, clouds of grey smoke rising with regular volume rolled forth and upward by the low current of wind. Apparently the house was empty—there had been time for escape to be made. None concerned them, but stood looking at the scene with the absorbed intentness usually witnessed at a fire; besides, to enter the dwelling at this stage would have been perilous. Nevertheless one man did so boldly, making for the room of the mistress. It was Jediah Lufkin, expecting to find her a charred body, unrecognisable, black as burnt witches of old. She met him, however, erect, red, with a mighty grasp on the handle of an iron box which she held to as to a rock; defiant, glaring upon him, burnt, scorched, anguished, but unyielding. No longer crippled or bent, he was face to face with an old woman of iron, red-hot iron she seemed to him. There was not breathing-time even, it was instant, it was a death-struggle; he grappled with her, seeking to wrench the box from her convulsive clutch. Sparks and fragments of fire and burning pieces of wood fell on them like a rain of vengeance. Walls crashed down, and the hoarse shout of the crowd without announced the dashing up of the engine. He struggled with her desperately. A gap was formed in the front by the falling of masonry. A young man leaped upon the blazing ridge for an instant and was driven back; he, however, saw the two and

"He heard the woman cry to him for aid, and sprang into the hot blinding interior."—PAGE 77.

believed the man was endeavouring to effect the escape of the afflicted woman. Again he made the attempt, sprang upon the fiery breach, stood in the frame of flame—white, for he was in the carpenter's garb worn at his work—lustrous of countenance, for he was fair to look upon—brave, for he was young, strong, vigorous, healthy: he heard the woman cry to him for aid, and sprang into the hot blinding interior: then those without encouraged him with a shout, but none durst follow. He believed the man's strength was unequal to the removal of his burden, and he caught her up valiantly, she clinging hard still to her treasure. Then the Mormon abandoned the venture—it was time to attend to the safety of his own precious life. He saw the stranger, who had thus boldly defeated him and saved the woman's life, mount the crumbling brick and wood, literally girt with the flames, his white cap and apron and jacket riddled with holes where the fire had fallen, the woman's gown alight and rising around her; and he saw no more: his brute-courage was at utmost strain and tension; bull-like he butted at the opening and cleared it, falling bruised and burnt and scared upon the brick pathway, from which some friendly hands dragged him to be properly cared for.

The young carpenter and his charge were meeting with similar kind attention. They were removed to an inn a short distance off, and a doctor was quickly in attendance. Noeba never once lost consciousness, nor yielded care of her box to any one. Thus it got about that the old woman had saved her money, and she received more attention than would have been the case had her money not been saved. Again and again she asked to see her preserver, and he each time came to her with unassuming kindness, full of solicitude concerning the suffering she was undergoing; and with trembling uplifted hands and enfeebled voice, she invoked a blessing upon him. "I had a son," she murmured, "not so comely to look upon, but he would have acted as you have done; as I would have blessed him I bless you, and may the good God who has spared my life through all this, spare yours for a long and honoured period. If my boy comes back—

alack! he won't know where to find me now—if he comes back, he will love you; brothers; my sons, both of you! God bless you!" She fell back, faint, and he applied restoratives, and she revived, smiling upon him. She was going through very anguish, in the form of bodily pain, from her wounds, but bore up with wonderful endurance, and, when he was by, supported as by some strength coming with his presence. He was much younger than her son would be by this, not more than twenty-seven years at most; but there were tender and thoughtful ways reminding her of him, and the lowered voice, inexpressibly sympathetic and tender, recalled her boy in the younger days before ever work and the world, disappointment and restless longing for a trial of fortune in the new world, spoiled the finer words and ways upon which she had been wont to hang all lovingly. Loss of him had doubled her up completely, had soured and embittered her; but this fresh and candid-looking friend who was so strong, so good, seemed to revive the human within her breast, and the old heart that had been growing narrow and dry enlarged amazingly. And long after, when blackened remains of the fire told of a dwelling where had lived an old woman, thought by one or two to hold the secret of the largest treasure ever consigned to the dark hiding of earth—long after its occurrence this woman felt gladness, for it had given her a protector, one to lean on. And she felt sadly to need one to lean upon—it was the secret of the clinging, lingering love of the absent—one to look up to; and it was no weak stripling, destitute alike of sense and judgment, but one even as a tower, firm, builded on sure foundations: one to ask counsel of—hitherto she had asked counsel of none, had lived solely isolated, not a voice amidst the millions giving advice all day long, so many live for nothing else—to guide or suggest or warn; one to bestow such love upon as does remain in an old heart like this, which is more than calm philosophy supposes.

She was ill after the excitement had lapsed, confined to her bed at the inn. He returned to his work on the second day afterwards, but would run out now and then to see how she progressed and whether wanting anything; and she would lie

between the intervals, looking for him with as utter eagerness as might have done some love-sick girl longing for his company. Of which idle pastime he knew nothing, his course thus far had been all untroubled by the worrying passion, and when he sometimes heard one or another talking of it he wondered what the thing could be.

And after work he would sit by her, talking gently, or reading. She had been used to neither talk nor reading, and they came with the beauty of a new experience and the force of a new knowledge. His choice of reading was simple—for her sake, not his own, he had long mastered a deeper text, devoting most of his spare time to the occupation—and from the Bible and the Progress he culled the passages so bountiful with sweetness and so appropriate. It was new language to Noeba Edred, and when with melodious earnestness he read of the Holy Carpenter of Nazareth, she trembled exceedingly.

"And you're no more than a carpenter yourself, you tell me?" she asked, doubtfully, for he read with such sweet expression, and his manners were not the manners of a workman.

"A journeyman carpenter," he said, not even wishing the credit of mastership.

"And you're alone, didn't you tell me; without relationship?"

"None that I know of. My parents died while I was but a boy. People were kind to me. I had a respectable middle-class bringing up, and having a talent of ingenuity I was apprenticed to the trade I most fancied. And I've a few savings: when I spend money it is upon some book I badly want." His hand was resting with fondness upon the 'Pilgrim's Progress' then lying upon the bed.

"Yours is a simple and good life," she said.

"It is an honest one, I hope," he answered.

"And you are brave with it all, and tender!"

"They go together." His eyes were bravely tender the while, in no way avoiding those of the forbidding-looking woman to whom he was so gently courteous.

She tossed restlessly, in great pain, throwing an arm out for

relief upon the coverlet. He took her hand in his deliciously cool hands, soothing the burning pain. Gradually her repulsive features became of softened expression, and she smiled upon him gratefully; she had lived so alien a life it was doubly beautiful to her, and all that was human and sensitive in her nature felt the affecting influence. He seemed so unlike all others, splendidly indifferent to selfishness, and kind with the noblest simplicity, she felt to be raised by the companionship, to breathe an atmosphere forgotten for many a long day; she knew the hideous old creature she was, disliked by man and woman, utterly removed from the recognition of civility and charity, with only one hope in life, one strand to which to cling passionately: when, therefore, this fine true man stooped, graciously compassionate, binding her cruel red sores, cooling the hot anguish, lifting her weary soul, she looked up, with the first tears shed for thirty years, and asked, "Tell me your name, that I may repeat it when alone, and think of it always when I think of you?"

"Saul Weir," he answered; and the low kind tones carried the words deep. She would never forget them; even his name was unlike all other names.

CHAPTER IX.

SAUL WEIR.

THE home of Saul Weir, journeyman carpenter, was very simple; two little rooms at the back of the house of a journeyman cabinetmaker. The rooms were clean; the cabinetmaker's wife was kind; Saul Weir was orderly, taking pride in keeping his rooms as they were designed to be by the thrifty housewife: thus all went pleasantly, and Saul Weir was as happy a workman as any in Kent.

His usual occupation after work was improving his mind. He had read of men humble as he who had attained a position, lived honoured, and died famous. They had been poor men in the beginning, so there must have been something inside of them, or something outside of them, possibly a combination of both, inner genius, outer education, that led to it; and Saul Weir reasoned thereupon and reflected.

The path did not appear, there was neither guide nor sign, but instinct prompted learning, and he bought books, studied them closely, and gained much by it; while his fellows squabbled over pipes and politics at the ale-house.

The cabinetmaker's name was Clough. His household consisted of these people: Mrs Clough, who did the work; the servant, who looked on; Miss Jane Clough, forewoman at a milliner's in an adjoining street, who came home to sleep; Miss Rachel Clough, apprenticed to the dressmaking, likewise returning at eventide; and Master Fred Clough, boy at the grocer's in Thanet Street, who came home after closing the shop. Thus Mr Saul Weir's companions were humble enough, the sphere a lowly one; but because he had done some reading he

did not hold his head above these worthy people in an offensive sense, neither did he devote time to idle talking that he felt was better given to the books. There was always a kind word and pleasant smile, and a grateful acknowledgment of the many little attentions matronly Mrs Clough was pleased to bestow. No more was given, nor was more expected.

Saul Weir was clever at his work, was liked by his brother workmen, was valued by his employer. The latter thought of him as of an unusually diligent and industrious young fellow, one whose head was free from the troublesome crotchets of the time in regard to labour, and who would work an hour or two more as soon as look at it. One day in the slack season Weir went to the counting-house and said, "Times are bad just at present, Mr Sawyer; I'm content to take lower wages until they're better." Sawyer did him the justice, when speaking of this to the timber-merchant, to say, "Not many young fellows would have done that, you know." "Of course you fell in with his view of it?" asked the timber-merchant, anxiously; he employed thirty men. "Of course I did!" answered Mr Sawyer, with a shrewd look; "and the sooner his example is followed the better!"

The other men did not love Saul Weir the better for it: neither did they harbour resentment. He was not one any man could hate; and as to violence, the most obtuse of them would be too wise to attempt it. This little anecdote imparts an idea of Saul Weir's nature. The man relied on principle, consistence regulated conduct, and he lived up to a standard. There is much in this: it is more general to disregard the finer rule.

Probably Saul Weir was not impressionable. The Miss Cloughs had been pining to be taken out on Sundays ever since he had lived with them; but he went to his church or for his walk alone; when the latter, a book was his sole company. They did not love him the better for it, neither did they harbour mortification; he was not one any girl could despise, however insensible he might be; so they ended by respecting him doubly. Grave doubts were rife as to whether Saul Weir ever had experienced an affection, but he had so

quiet a manner there was no getting to the bottom of him. Their servant, the inactive spectator, said Mr Weir looked higher; and as love was the sole subject this young person gave her mind to, she was perhaps qualified to speak.

But when Mr Weir was out very much, and sometimes very late, of an evening, it was supposed something of the sort entertained him. Saul was not the person to talk of his deeds, and had said nought of his gallant rescue of an infirm old woman, nor of how patiently he watched beside her bed during recovery. As usual, a wrong motive was imputed, but he was unaware of it, and it harmed him not.

One evening Noeba Edred said to him, "You are a carpenter, and you are clever. Can you tell me whether it is possible to make a box without lid or lock and not to be opened?" And the young man considered, did not disturb himself as to why she asked the question, but thought it out, as accustomed when studying his books, and replied—

"Yes, Mrs Edred, quite possible; wedges of hard wood joined to fit mathematically, might form a case no one could force."

"Thank you. I thought so. Will you make me one if I give you the money for the wood?"

"With pleasure."

"And be good enough not to tell anybody of it."

"Certainly not."

"I want the iron box under my pillow to form its centre; can it be done?"

"Yes, it will add strength. Shall I take it with me?" The woman's cheek became paler, and her trembling shook the curtains of the bed. He did not observe the symptoms of agitation.

"I suppose it can't be got in afterwards, neither can you do it here?"

"No," he said, smiling, but not experiencing surprise at her eagerness.

And she permitted it. He took the valuable casket, wrapped round with a piece of print, a cunning idea of its owner's. He took it home to his lodging, and the cabinet-

maker and family saw the whilom exemplary one enter with something wrapped in a piece of print, and it rather darkened the suspended belief.

Small things index character. He placed the box under his pillow that night, because she would have done the same. It was hard, and interfered with his rest, still he did not remove it, nor wonder all night what was inside; but he thought a long time, working out how best to set about his task.

In the morning he took the box with him to his workshop. He placed it in his tool-chest, and locked it very carefully—not because he attached intrinsic value to it or its contents, but out of respect for the care Mrs Edred seemed to exercise.

During the morning he looked around the yard and shop; he would be particular as to the wood used. It must be hard, it must also be impervious not only to man's efforts to take it to pieces, but likewise to age and elements—always excepting that fierce foe with which he had recently struggled. There was ash—Saul Weir knew its durability, used it daily for boards; the handles of their tools were made of it, but the handles sometimes split, the boards had to be repaired or replaced—he looked further: there was white thorn; well he loved it: and crab, of which the heads of their beetles were made: these would not split, were durable, and as to the elements—he had fitted mill-wheels with cogs of the latter.

Why this care? Mrs Edred had once declared, get stronger, she would go in search of her son. Saul Weir believed the case was preparatory to a voyage, but he asked no questions; if he made the case anticipatory it would be ready either way. Now came in his learning. They never had a bit of hickory on the place, but he knew he could get it at the timber-merchant's. Tough and hard, this wood will withstand the action of water; coopers used it for the hoops of barrels and tubs; it was aboard on the masts in the harbour; the wheelwright applied it for axle-trees of waggons. These tests seemed sufficient. He asked for half an hour, and walked over to the timber-yard, where the foreman was superintending the bracing of once stately trunks destined for the saw-pit.

"Good morning, Mr Weir."

"Good morning, sir; I want to see if you can find me a little piece of extra hard wood, for strong work, and to stand exposure."

"Well, I hope I can," answered the foreman, pleasantly; adding, "American locust I should recommend. I know posts of it that have been standing over a century, exposed to all weathers. The turners tell us it lasts out everything. One of the ship's carpenters here yesterday said there never was and never will be its equal on the waters."

"I was in favour of hickory."

"Which you will,—send you either; but I doubt if hickory is more enduring than Spanish chestnut."

"Send me the locust, early, with a memorandum."

"Thank you. Nothing for Mr Sawyer?"

"Not to-day. Good morning." Weir returned to his work. The foreman was not so punctual as Saul; it was late in the afternoon when the locust came; he was busy then and could not commence on it, but took home with him a cube of the wood, and some finer tools, and after tea set to work cutting a model—innumerable little wedges that, before he had done, fitted with geometrical exactness. Then he discovered to his mortification he had not allowed for the all-important centre, and gave over to reflect awhile, during which the cabinetmaker came up to show him a fine piece of purple-wood upon which he had been engaged inlaying ivory and ebony.

"I find you also in the mosaic way to-night, Mr Weir."

"Yes; I've a problem here I intend to put together before going to bed."

"Fine piece of wood; what is it?"

"Locust. By the way, what is your hardest wood?"

"Pollard oak, I fancy. We've a splendid piece in hand, ornamented with carving in brown English oak. But we use a deal of cherry for its durability, and it takes the polish as well as any wood."

"It is more in the rough wearing way I mean, no polish."

"Black walnut, I should say. On the bit o' land my father

farms there are posts of it that have stood a long time, and I know in our trade it defies heat and damp."

"I have been told the turners hold fast by this locust."

"Not altogether; the hornbeam is in large request. For my own part, and I've worked on it a many years, I believe the holly to be as stable as any wood; certainly we chiefly use it for inlaying, but can tell pretty well. Nine out of ten in our trade will say the hard maple is the strongest wood, but I doubt its superiority."

"Well, thank you, Mr Clough; and let me tell you I admire the piece of work in your hand much."

"Perhaps I could return the compliment, if I knew what you're doing, but I don't." And with a civil nod the worthy artisan went his way, leaving his lodger puzzled, craftsman in wood though he might be. He had got this locust, but was in doubt if, after all, he had got the hardest wood. He set to again at the problem, and accomplished it, and then gave an hour to his books. While upon this there flashed across him the pertinent interrogation, "Why not have brought the iron box home with him as on the previous night,—would it be all right at the workshop?" It grew upon him, became an uneasiness, and he was not of the disposition to lie down on his bed and let any such evil intruders usurp the calmness necessary for rest earned of honest labour. He put on his hat and walked out, intending to go down to the workshop.

When he had gone, Miss Jane and her sister came up to his room and went smelling about. They thought the wood odorous, but scented something else.

"Tell you what 'tis, Jane, all this anxiety about hard wood and this going out business means something, I fear something serious."

And the dressmaker, who was given to discussing horrors with the other young women over their work, went on to say in lowered tones, "I believe—he is trying—to make—*a coffin!*" This shocking supposition was communicated in a stage whisper, and the more light and ephemeral milliner tried to look the impressiveness she did not feel. There was but one chip or shaving on the carpet (Saul Weir was the spirit of

neatness), this, however, was discovered and dangled contemptuously by the latter. "A jewel-casket for his young lady, perhaps." And they looked unutterable things.

"Something new for Mr Weir to go out this time of night."

"We mustn't be surprised, I suspect, at the hours kept; how possible it is to be deceived in one!"

While Saul Weir's morals were being weighed in the balance, his legs were bearing him quickly in the direction of his sphere of labour. This was at the remote end of the old town, in a dull, bleak, and lonely quarter, mainly taken up by wood and tanyards, coal-sheds, iron-works, brick-fields, and other of the ruder manufactories. He possessed a key that unlocked the high gate, and another that would admit him to the workshop. He moved with caution, for he would else have come to grief; it was very dark, and there were trunks, blocks, and planks in all directions. The workshop was a long low shed, with a glass front to it, and throughout was fitted with the implements in general use by those of his craft. The best hands kept their tool-chests on the premises, the others brought and took away their baskets. Saul Weir was walking with caution, as we have said, not being one of those to break his neck for a trifle; the accumulation of sawdust and shavings trod soft as a carpet; there was a wind astir with a mournful noise of its own, and the great beams where the sawyers worked creaked as by a strain still on their girders. This was the only disturbance, and Weir was not responsible for it, and it was not this that caused a man stooping by his tool-chest to desist an instant from what he was engaged upon, and look around with scared and guilty intentness. The man had a light with him, but for safety kept it shrouded; every now and then, however, its flash aided his operations, and these would never have been seen, had not some unusual visit to the yard revealed them, for the workshop faced a dead wall, an especial abomination to Mr Weir, who loved the country. When Saul all at once caught sight of a flash, that played for an instant, leaving the well-known interior exposed from end to end, it was so sudden in the midst of the dense darkness that he stood still a moment, thinking he had been deceived,

that it had been one of those swift gleams crossing our eyes sometimes after long and close application to fine work, and then, again, thinking it might have been a flash of lightning: but when he saw it again—saw, moreover, a man operating upon his tool-chest—he drew a quick breath, stood firm, the shoulders drawn square, and the head thrown back; for this sort of thing was repugnant to him. The sinews of a giant seemed suddenly given to him; his disgust conferred strength of itself, even if he had not enough without it for the looking after his own. He stood about the centre of the long window—he could have brought the whole shed down about the ears of the wretched depredator, but he wanted to see what he was up to. He did—saw the iron box being lifted from the chest.

"No, you don't!" said Mr Saul Weir, coolly.

He waited for no more, but deliberately walked in, the door being, of course, unfastened. He knew the ins and outs of the place better than the nocturnal thief, and made for the spot without much error, while saying in a tone leaving no doubt of his being an awkward customer, "I'll trouble you for that box, and next to show your passport."

In the dark he heard the lid of his chest raised swiftly and guessed the meaning. It followed, instantly, a lunge was made at him by the unseen hand with one of his own tools. "Oh, that's it," thought Mr Weir, not troubled nor alarmed, and working it out, as was his custom. It might have been exciting to many, and a terrible moment to most. This temperately-blooded muscular piece of manhood was prepared for all sorts of contingencies, and made no more of this than he would of accompanying the lifeboat when rockets warned of lives in peril upon the bar without the harbour. He knew the lid of his chest was down, and before a second attempt upon his life was made, lightly stepped upon it, and coming down on the other side closed with the wretch, whom he forced to drop both weapon and box, and to fall on his knees beneath the weight of his massive hands.

"Now, you vampire, I'll find you quarters for the night. I haven't seen your face, and I don't want,—I can imagine it.

Some hours' reflection upon events may be profitable." He had him by the collar of his coat, and, regardless of struggling, kicking, and swearing, marched him deftly forth, and with considerable cleverness, right to the deep shaft or pit where the sawyers worked; and so neatly was this effected, his prisoner was down before aware of the proximity of danger. Not deep enough for risk to life or limb, the sides were yet so even, he was as effectually provided for as though in the county jail. Mr Weir had too much regard for his time to take the trouble to march him through the streets of Ramsgate, with the additional labour of making some half-stupid policeman understand all about it. He returned to the shed for the box, and accidentally kicked the lantern the man had used. He lit it, looked round, smiling at the affray, and saw upon the ground the man's hat. He was not curious, but as it lay on its crown he read *Jediah Lufkin, Utah*, and it struck him as singular that a man should travel so far to do so dirty a deed; but he left him in the pit to repent, and call upon his prophet if he would, and trudged on to his home.

He walked up-stairs, not with stealth, but with considerate softness, that the tired members of the family might not be disturbed. The daughters heard him, and remarked to one another how he was creeping in so as not to be heard.

He closed his door, and placed the box, as on the previous night, under his pillow, doubling his coat over it for comfort when asleep. He then washed his hands. He invariably performed this operation before saying his prayers and reading his usual portion of Scripture. It was a belief of his, in fine simplicity and earnestness, that an honest man's hands should be as clean as his heart when communing with his Maker. Saul Weir had nobody but himself to pray for, but he included the men and women known to him with whom work or leisure brought him in contact, and if man or woman had looked with ill favour upon him during the day, as they sometimes did, forgave them in that evening prayer. He handled the Bible in daily use with striking reverence: it was once his mother's. It was marked in many places; it was thumbed; every pencil and thumb mark were hers, loved with a strong devotion by

this real deep manhood, perfect by all physical tension, yet with the tender feeling of those who have suffered much and so do feel, with the guilelessness and purity of a little child, with the aspiration of all truly great hearts, with the yearning for the exercise of active mental power, and with that tremendous energy and perseverance whereby the men who have been to no colleges nor enjoyed the privileges brought by birth, wealth, and influence, carve a way to the front. He loved those marks, he the poor artisan, with his intelligence groping about by itself seeking to woo intellect from the shadowy lurking-places, the threshold upon which was hallowed; seeking to gather up the scattered lines of learning acquired by others in their youth-time; having read something of others still, who like himself were very poor, and unlettered, yet came through it all, both with information, with knowledge, and that which makes these thrice valuable, *experience*. He would love the old Bible, doubtless, through it all, and those marks where a dear thumb had so often pressed, and ever as royal seals to him, would, unless he changed greatly, be always as precious. Yet sometimes fresh signs displace the old imprints, and the sacred traces of the mother's hand become indistinct when lighter and all careless fingers twine memories away. It has been so: and even in life the beautiful faces of aged women have been more lined by this than by the advance of years. They would so like to keep the youthful love there still, and never feel to need it more; but they see it passing to the stranger, and bitter despondency ensues, so vivid with sad betrayal is this experience we must all live out, until the wondrous cessation, the illimitable rest; when disappointment is at an end for ever. Saul Weir's treasured clinging to the memory of his mother was very touching. None knew the good son he would have made had she been left to him; but One knew the good son he had been since she was taken.

He slept very calmly that night, and arose betimes, thinking to arrive with the first at the yard. In this he was mistaken; shouts had been heard proceeding from the yard, and a worthy mason who lived close by came out to learn the reason. The

voice led in the direction of the saw-pit, and there the mason discovered the reason; it was a well-worn hearth-broom sort of reason he looked down upon, but when he hailed the thing it was a round red face, probably smooth-looking in the general way, but just then agitated, that turned upwards.

"Who are you?" asked the mason.

"A visitor in the town—wandered into this yard last night, and found myself down here, pretty good shock, but thanks to the sawdust, no mischief is done. Get me a rope or a ladder and I'll give you a shilling."

"Well, I'd do it without that, but I'll take your shilling all the same if you are kind enough to offer it." The man procured the ladder there and then, and Jediah Lufkin, Utah, stood on the brink wearing the oddest expression of countenance conceivable.

"Reminds you of Joseph, don't it?" said the mason, taking the shilling.

"Yes," replied the rescued, "I swear by Joseph, and goodbye to ye!" And he walked on, the mason thinking him a curious being altogether. The mason had just gone in to his early breakfast when the curious being returned, and without loss of a moment walked to the workshop. The door had been locked by Weir, but he effected an entrance as before. He saw the object for which he had returned, crown upwards, and placed the uncommon hat on his uncommon head. It was while doing this he said to himself, "Twice, my friend, you have thwarted me! By the prophet, but you'll get it warm shortly, or my name ain't Lufkin! And you're not likely to bring the box here again, it strikes me; and if you don't, you'll leave it somewhere else; where, I kinder consider, my shrewdness will find out for you."

He walked on with resolution, not desiring further encounter at that time.

Thus it happened that when Saul Weir came to the yard he found his man gone. He was glad. The trouble of pursuing the only course possible had he been there—a distasteful course to Mr Weir—was spared him. He had the box with him, and kept it by him until eight o'clock, when he took it

away, a distance that he walked in seven minutes, to the inn where Noeba Edred was staying. He sent up to say he would like to see her, and after a brief interval went up to the chamber where she was sitting propped by hard pillows, and looking worn and anxious, but her face lighted up at once on his entrance.

He took her hand, asking, "How do I find you this morning?"

"Didn't sleep much. You brought my box? It's good of you. I was troubled for it."

"It was safe in my keeping; but I have done all I require with it, taking measurement and trying the wood, which I shall have in sections by to-night, and will come here and put together for you."

"God bless you for all. And it's seasonable?"—asked with the most intense anxiety.

"It will stand any amount of exposure to weather, and a considerable deal of force, before yielding."

"Yes, an' I thank you. It is what I wanted. You're coming to-night?"

"At the usual time."

"I'll count the hours till you're here!" He smiled at the eagerness, half of interest, half of affection, and kindly bidding her farewell, returned to his work.

And in time that should have been given to his meals, he proceeded with his task, taking a snatch while engaged at it. A fellow operative asked, "What are you doing, Saul Weir?" To whom he civilly answered, "Obliging a person who can't do this work." And wonderfully he kept at it through the day, and after hours, because not quite complete, instead of going to his lodging to tea as usual, so that Miss Jane was of necessity induced to interpret it, "He is with her now, you know." He was, later; but it chanced to be a more elderly and less favoured "her" than Miss Jane supposed.

Very intently did the old woman watch him at the work. His wedge-like sections were cut to an exquisite exactness, and a slight rap of the small hammer set them in place with a precision and evenness truly marvellous: thus the bottom,

sides, and top, with perfectly inserted end pieces, encased the iron box, and when he had finally tapped the solid surface, making all level, it presented a protection that justified the woman's burst of enthusiasm and gratitude.

Of course it added to the bulk and weight, and Saul Weir said, "You will find it more cumbersome to carry about."

"I've little else, so it won't matter. I'm a poor woman now, Mr Weir, the whole lot of me would fetch little except to the marine-store dealer."

"Oh, come, come, you must not talk like that. Do not dwell upon your loss too much."

"Nay," said she, with a cunning look; "I haven't lost quite all; but, I'd lived a while in the old house—'twas a sort of shelter; an' I spent my earnings on the buying of it. 'Tisn't as though I could go to service and begin all over agen"—rocking herself to and fro, and plucking half hysterically at the strings of her night-cap, as though strangled. Perhaps no one but this thoughtful and kindly-disposed young man would have so calmly unloosed the strings, so quickly have procured a glass of water; for his patient was by no means of prepossessing manners or appearance. Mr Weir could not well have had a more ill-favoured charge if he had sought all round the coast for it. A morbid fit of depression had seized her, and she, sobbing violently, moaned for her son, lamenting her loneliness, and gasping there wasn't a soul to care for her. Considering how he had worked all day, it came hard upon Mr Weir, and, no medical student, he did not know that the seizure was nothing uncommon; but he swallowed his sorrow, and tackled her malady manfully. "I must entreat you to look on the brighter side, friend—haven't I assured you my right hand shall work for you, my heart care for you? There won't be loneliness while I live. I certainly can't put my hand on your son, so it's no good to say I can; and judging from the maps in my atlas this world is too spacious to go looking about for one solitary person in." It seemed to set her quivering in every nerve; with an almost wail she cried: "Soon as ever I'm strong enough, I know the part to look for him in; I shall find him, surely!"

"If you're going to carry the case about with you, it'll be an expensive round, and I fancy you'll wish you'd never started. Don't feel angry with me for saying so; I am thinking of yourself—far from equal to encountering such fatigue, and being so weighted. Let me find you some nice comfortable cottage-home where you can settle down, and I can call to see you very often."

She was lying back prostrate and exhausted, and certainly did not look a fitting object to undertake the modest journey contemplated. It was a very yellow-white face back on the pillow, with a frill round, adding to the ghastliness. It was a very thin wasted hand hanging down, and holding on to a corner of the locust-wood. The young man, moved by great pity, could not permit, if he might prevent, her eccentric course; so he was patient and forbearing, sitting by her side with gentleness until she became calmer and more herself, and then taking leave as usual with the old pleasant smile, that lingered always after he had gone, seeming to warm her. When the door had closed upon him, and the stairs creaked their last on his receding, she felt sorry that she had given way so, knowing him to be the sole friend. "I shall lose him too!" she painfully moaned; but then a sort of consciousness of his nature being one of those grandly-tempered ones, taking no cognizance of ill-humoured moods, brought with it relief.

She rested quieter after it, with her hand placed fondly on his work.

Passed into happier dozing—still, there, as the dead; giving the landlady quite a shock while ushering in a confederate of the Mormon, who, with a very professional air of consideration, softly whispered, "Mr Saul Weir so particularly wished me not to wake her if asleep. I'll sit down. Kindly ask my assistant into the parlour."

CHAPTER X.

ALCHEMY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

It was strange to see a large room that contained but little furniture, crowded with many extraordinary vessels, of a mould unlike any in use at the present day; copper, iron, and tin, and one of gold, all exceedingly dirty, most of them filled with ingredients, some of them broken, one exploded and the pieces strewn broadcast.

Fireplace and hearth were overrun with some dead metal that, when molten, had been spilled on the floor; like the old lava it was dimly terrible now; indestructible, transfixed, and harmless.

The windows were broken, successive explosions and shattering accidents had tested the temper of the glass too frequently to justify repairs. It was well, since it is probable, but for his broken windows, Oliver Redland would long ago have been suffocated by poisonous fumes. People living either side were kept in a state of chronic terror lest they and theirs should be blown to pieces. They believed the old man made fireworks clandestinely; people lower down and on the basement level were never quite sure whether they would be blown down into the earth, or up, after the awful lodger, into the sky; some protested, but the landlord, who was a leather-seller, said they were fools and he shouldn't offend his best lodger to please their whims and fancies. Mr Redland could not have pursued his scientific research with the same undisturbed facility elsewhere, and paid liberally for the use of the two rooms at the top of this miserable tenement; besides, he was poor and could not afford better.

And of what account was comfort while engaged on this laborious experimental investigation? Bare boards and chairs and tables! The only place of ease to rest the body, weary by stooping, was a hard bed, after long late toil. But the wondrous riches in store would compensate when the aim and end of it all were accomplished.

The rumour of a colossal treasure, concealed in some safe hiding-place that had successfully preserved its secret through many ages, reached Oliver Redland when engaged in the philosophic research which had conferred scientific distinction upon his name, and, unlike very many whom the rumour also stirred for the moment, he did not regard it as a necessarily improbable and wildly extravagant fiction. He saw no reason for believing the existence of that wealth of centuries to be mythical; but devoted keen and minute examination at leisure, and, with clear-headed reasoning, gave months to the search for corroborative testimony, and ascertained that there could be no doubt of its having been known to the ancients, believed in and witnessed in the Middle Ages, and honestly given credence to by the moderns; unfortunately, all long gathered to their rest. Although it did not follow, as Mr Redland knew very well, that those of preceding generations could have pointed to the region of its concealment, it was by no means certain the treasure had not been despoiled; still, if of the enormous extent supposed, a monarch could scarcely have exhausted it. Mr Redland knew that it *had* existed. From the time when that belief was confirmed, the subject exercised a startling fascination; the whole resources of science were wielded upon the attempt to discover the spot, and science with this man represented a power verging upon the supernatural. In his hands it became a power at once awful and sublime. The science of the moderns he discarded entirely in this inquiry. There was older science, if rugged and without nicety, that was calculated to aid him better; he knew the ancients put faith in a process of discovering gold, where hidden, and at what depths; a process that would be scoffed at in our enlightened day. He held to a theory that if the old impostors' tenets and code of working were diligently and

faithfully sifted of verbiage and artifice, that if their rude chemistry was devotedly disentangled from its mysticism of astrology and alchemy, more valuable aid would be forthcoming than the science of to-day offered, although it would be by the science of to-day that he would weigh the pretension of the past. Ignoring the nonsense of the divining-rod superstition, he yet learned, and in part believed, that both Dee and Lilly were acquainted with more substantial methods of discovery, founded upon the directions given by Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, and subsequently tried, tested, and improved by Roger Bacon and Raymond Lulli. It became a grave quest, followed with unflagging energy, this retracing of an old belief. For a long time he was groping in the dark, with many a doubt as to the issue, yet with an ever-increasing conviction of there being a substratum of truth that would prove helpful. And the months and years fled apace, and the man grew old, grey, wrinkled, as they had in whose footprints he followed; his prospects—save for this possible illusion—were ruined, his circumstances contracted, until sometimes even hunger's grim greeting seemed imminent. His disposition and nature changed to irritability and moodiness; the grand aims once pointing to a destiny glorious as that of Davy or Brewster, narrowed to a would-be grip of the still intangible and untenable. And the older he grew, the apparently less likely to accomplish his desire, the more resolute, persistent, and determined he became. His retorts might burst, his alembics crack, his crucibles crumble on the brasiers, but he would replace them if he sold his coat for it, and never relinquish the pursuit but with his life. There were forces in nature that should be constrained to guide and direct, and by all the mighty influence of a soul to which such forces are subservient, they should disclose. And this in the shadow of a great square warehouse, in the midst of the din of the Modern Babel!

And he was called a crazy maker of fireworks for it, nevertheless he would soon set all that right if he discovered his treasure!

Fireworks indeed! The poor should go free to a gala, where,

by rocket-light, Glory to Gold in the highest should blaze upon the pall-like sky its defiant outrage, and the poor of the nineteenth century stare in their darkness at the great illumined revelation of the time.

And he believed he was drawing very near that time; his crucial tests appeared to be yielding something of an outline of progress. Molten metals, pulverized minerals, subtle blending of the ores of affinity, signs by chemical antagonism, and a general reducing to one solution of scattered geologic principles, with other indications, pointed, more plainly than ever before, to the path he must follow. Mr Redland laboured at a disadvantage while dealing with the old dabblers and adepts, because at the threshold he parted company: their faith having been the transmutation of the baser metals into gold; his, the discovery, merely, of the site where gold had been deposited. That the route he should follow would be made manifest sooner or later he never for a moment doubted. That certain guidance at the spot would be afforded him, he was confident. That the treasure eventually would be his, he had no anxiety about whatever, or he emphatically would not have been in debt at half the laboratories of London, or have wasted one single hour upon an occupation productive of nothing but vanity. He was aware that others besides Zosimus, in the fifth century, have declared that certain woods change to a peculiar hue when growing over gold, and that certain herbs, although luxuriant in the immediate neighbourhood, yet perish at that particular spot; and he took all these assertions, peeled them of husks and rubbish, and, as he thought, preserved something extraordinary withal. He was aware that others besides Thales of Miletus have declared that water continually dropping over the place where gold lies buried will cause a yellow rim to edge the soil thus slowly worn away. He was aware that Suidas, the learned Greek, ingenuously propounded the fable of Jason and the Golden Fleece of Colchis to simply indicate a treatise on gold-making, written on hides; and this author had defined the discovery of gold to be supported by the appearance of curious fissures or cracking of the earth's crust, said to result

whenever the precious metal is covered by the five primitive earths — alumina, glucina, yttria, zirconia, and thoria. His Hermes Trismegistus, with geometric rule, and the sonorous law laid by the Almacantar, or series of circles of the sphere parallel to the horizon, described more intricate lines, but he went at the old Egyptian with a flourish of our scarcely improved mathematics and untied part of the skein, straightening the long strong measurement, to be of infinite aid, or he was much mistaken! Oliver Redland was a profound scholar himself, and had no intention of becoming confused, perplexed, intimidated, nor imposed upon by any of the ancients, whom he would much have liked to send to the Middle Class school in Little Brown Street, Marylebone, (where he had sent his nephew, Rupert, before finishing his elementary tuition personally;) just to tone their conceit thought Mr Redland, to whom the conceit of the ancients outweighed even the conceit of the moderns.

But at this present, Almacantar's staff—with a perfectly accurate arch of fifteen degrees—was more in his hand than the tutor's rod. Rupert was deep in learning on his own account, while his uncle was hob and nob with Egyptians, Arabians, Greeks, and the men of the three alchemical centuries, for whom Rupert had little veneration and less liking. Of delicate health, sensitive perceptions, and innate refinement, possessing, moreover, a love of domestic comfort and home-like quiet, it will be imagined how this dirty, disorderly, explosive kind of existence embittered his boyhood, and made his youth miserable. In fact, he was accustomed to think these old writers had been instrumental in wrecking the happiness of his uncle and himself. Yet Rupert remembered him as the very personification of courtliness and kindness, when he was upright and handsome, when the Bible was superior to Ptolemy's Almagest, and love of the boy was a distinguishing sentiment among many amiable qualities.

Rupert had not the remotest idea of the search upon which his uncle was engaged, or he would have detested it with redoubled prejudice,—the pursuit of gold, beyond the quantity necessary to support existence upon, being wholly repulsive

to him. The one pursuit, in the opinion of Rupert Redland, should rather be the bettering of the conditions of others, mental, moral, and physical, than improving that of our own; in the spirit of selfishness, that is. Thus, had he acquired information of the gigantic purpose at the foundation of uncle Oliver's messing about, and which the young man charitably supposed was caused by over-tried faculties, his dislike to it would have remained less tolerant. As it was, Rupert submitted to discomfort, poverty, sharp words, for the sake of the kindness of old, and out of respect for that almost illimitable knowledge he knew his relative possessed.

Thus Rupert Redland had grown beneath the fostering of chemistry and the spare nurture of science, and had grown thin, slight, all feeling, as it were; unstrung by a breath of wind, depressed by the veriest change of atmosphere tending to the gloomy. Seldom feeling, so to say, well; never two days alike. Sometimes tremblingly soaring to heights from which rapturous visions opened; more often in the depths, shut in, weighed upon, bogs everywhere, thick fog obscuring the light towards which he struggled lovingly. At such times, how the crowd and noise without jarred upon him; how the discomfort within, chilled! There, should have been welcoming and warmth, sweetness and cleanliness; and there was only that grim upper storey, noxious fumes, the cold comfort of alchemy, the abstracted, half-irascible greeting of the old, toil-weary, thought-worn philosopher. Truly, as Theodore Lute had said, there was no one to greet with tender welcome, none to sing his songs in rose-world. Those words had gone from the heart, if ever words did, when Rupert so gratefully shook his hand while saying to him, "God bless you for those kind words. I am in bleak, cold, and loveless ways, with never a voice to speak tenderly to me, or a heart to feel glad when I come!" And Theodore had only spoken of his sister, of her beauty, goodness, and devotion, saying, "Would I could find you a sister like mine, Rupert, and you would require little else to live for!" Yes, Rupert felt those words. One above witnessed how acutely, for there had been longing for some such bliss, scarcely defined, it

seemed so improbable, so utterly far away; and when his kind-hearted companion made use of the term, it thrilled him.

One evening toward the end of July, Rupert Redland, returning as usual to this poor domicile, there found Mr Oliver in a state of nervous excitement that surprised his nephew exceedingly. It was the custom of Mr Oliver to take his meals just now, when he could get them, at one of the neighbouring coffee-houses. His nephew, perforce, had to do the same. Upon this evening he had done the same, at the least dirty of the places passed upon his way home. It was Rupert's usual course to hang up his hat, change his coat for a still older one worn indoors, silently seat himself, and turn to the books occupying so much of his thoughts; but upon this particular evening, uncle Oliver abruptly checked these processes, laid a skinny hand on his arm, and breathlessly begged he would wait a moment.

"I want you to go out for me, Rupert; beautiful evening, warm certainly, but the walk will do you good. I'm compelled to go a journey to-morrow, my boy, and haven't a fraction, not a fraction, sir" (half sadly, half proudly, and with a spirit of assurance as though conscious the fractionless epoch drew close to its finality). "Going into the country, Rupert, where I expect to receive the reward of the long years of patient investigation upon which you have known me engaged, and which, I fear, may have made the home a little less comfortable for you than we would have had it; but we will make up for it, Rupert. It is extremely probable I may be in a position to allow you something, of course within reason, for your pocket. Think of that! How nicely we should get along then, Rupert; and how different this hot and sometimes unkind London will appear to us with a sufficiency in our pockets and some proper clothing on our backs!"

With a shiver Rupert thought of all he had suffered on account of his shiny elbows, greasy hat, and often rusty boots, —thought of the kindliness of those, well-dressed, which always had something of stooping about it—of how he shrank under it—of his quivering dread of being criticized—his mortal

suffering when with the supercilious—his writhing at the Club, from which he would not retire, feeling himself entitled to the slight gleam of sociability it offered, and knowing himself to be the equal of those constituting it. These were strange words of his uncle's, and Rupert knew not what to make of them; they brought pain, too, in their wake—if there was pleasure underlying them, he would be only too glad to find it.

After a brief pause, Mr Oliver went on to the purport of Rupert's errand—

"I want to see if you can borrow me a couple or three pounds to get away with and support expenses. Don't go to anybody who has already obliged us; and be sure not to disclose the purpose, or they'll think I'm running away, or else that I may bring something back with me wherewith to pay them, and both notions will be unpleasant. Better try the Club, Rupert—I'm sure the friends there will help; a pound or two to them is of little moment."

Through it all the young student had resolutely avoided this. Once before when solicited to "try the Club," he had sold the most precious of his books rather than do it, so that the old man should not be wholly without what he had asked. But this point-blank repetition of it was inexpressibly painful and embarrassing; for the moment he felt that he *could not* do as requested. Still this contemplated journey was so out of the common, such an unprecedented occurrence, the surprise of its announcement helped to tone the bitter experience. There had often been parcels of mineral, soil, and samples of strata from distant parts to pay for, when there had not been enough in the house to defray the cost of carriage; there had been instruments and vessels and utensils to pay for; curiously-shaped pottery, made purposely in Staffordshire; and castings at the foundry, cunning work in long disused metal; and herbs and plants from half the counties of England; antique basins and pans from old stores and collections of the antiquaries; there had been old books to pay for, the result of diligent hunting amongst hidden-away stalls; there had been chemicals without limit;—but there had never been a journey to pay for, and Rupert contemplated his uncle with

some surprise, not to say apprehension, for he scarcely thought him in travelling condition.

"If you are going out of town, uncle, if you don't mind, I will accompany you."

"Not at all, not at all! Very good of you, but I do not need it,—shall do very well."

"Is it imperative that this money should be borrowed?"

"Well, if it is not, I have no alternative but to walk, and I don't suppose you would care to see me crossing the country like a tramp?"

"No, God forbid!" said tender-hearted Rupert with emotion, the very picture chilling his warm blood.

"Then can you tell me what else is to be done, sir, except borrow the money?"

In reply the young man put on his hat, and while trembling slightly, bade the scholar a respectful and affectionate adieu. He went down the creaking staircase, great heaviness at his heart; and the old leather-seller saw and called to him, and Rupert's heart sank lower still, for he knew what it meant. There were arrears of rent, and like every one else the landlord came to the younger man for settlement; from Mr Oliver they never by any chance obtained it, partly through his preoccupation, partly from inability to meet the claims.

"Sorry to trouble you, Mr Redland, if you're going out, sir, but the rent being some weeks behind, I thought perhaps you'd like to see it square."

"I hope to be back in an hour or two, and will bring it in with me."

"Thank you, sir; it will not put you out, I hope?"

"Common honesty should put no man out, Mr Tanner, or there is something wrong somewhere. You ought to have had this before. Thanks, for reminding us of our duty."

They knew how honest he was, it was the reason of their troubling him so often. Up-stairs he had a box of mathematical instruments, a watch that had belonged to his father, and an umbrella of decent appearance, he would see what could be done with these before going to the Club; but it made him doubly sad having this additional and just claim to

meet that evening. He loved all his poor treasures,—could not sell them outright,—would seek to obtain a loan upon them of some pawnbroker, and his delicate face blanched to more delicate paleness at the revolting office. He went down with his treasures, the box under his coat—he could not bear for those about to know of his extremity. A woman was entering, he flushed and then became cold; it was only their laundress, but she was an awful being when she wanted her money. Before she could shriek her business to the various floors, he gasped, "I'll call upon you in little over an hour!" and hurried on. She knew him to be truthful—that he would wrench his white teeth out and sell them, but she should be paid. Thus they showed him no mercy, and gave him no grace.

The sultry heat caused him to feel deadly faint, or it may have been the suffering he was undergoing. The busy stream of people hurrying home or bent upon pleasure caused his head to ache and throb with burning measure to his heart's quick pulsation. He walked on, looking thoughtfully and with intense sadness upon the ground, right away to another part of the noisy city. He came to King's Cross; right and left of him the Lombardy Arms hung out. He entered the most quiet-looking of the shops, where one person only was waiting at the counter, a young man like himself, and Rupert gazed with sorry interest upon this other, and, from first looking upon his face, could not withdraw his glance. So beautiful a countenance he had never set eyes upon, nor one so sad. All the sweet *hauteur* of gods, all the soft ideality of poets, all the soul-shed sublimity of martyrs, seemed centred on that face, where anguish was rendering it a wonder of humanity never to be forgotten. One of the pawnbroker's assistants was appraising a sumptuously bound copy of the poems of Robert Burns, and with vulgar irreverence was telling the young man that Burns might fetch a price in Scotland, but was worth nothing at all in England, The lie on the face of it caused the young Englishman, awaiting his turn, to flush crimson, and pant with short dangerous breathing while the speaker offered to lend eighteenpence on the book. Its owner,

with a quivering lip, begged to be advanced but another shilling, upon which the man threw him the book with the brutal remark, that he could get a waggon-load of them at his price. The owner was about to hand it back, assenting to the offer, when Redland stayed his hand. "Wait a moment," he said, hastily; "I'm in a hurry, if you don't mind," and put his collection on the counter, while the other unfortunate, in confusion and surprise, shrank back. The pawnbroker's assistant valued Mr Rupert Redland's treasures.

"Two-and-six!"

Infamous as it was, he nodded; he had heard enough of appeal. The man wrote the transfer, and Rupert took the money. This he slipped in passing into the other's hand, then hurried out, quickly followed by the unknown whom he had so generously befriended, and who pressed forward until beside him.

"Pray, pardon me," said Mr Redland, "I saw your love for the volume, and how you would have felt parting with it; besides, it would have been sin to do so. I am only sorry that I have not more to add to the trifle in your hand."

The graceful act moved the other so much, tears were in his large expressive eyes—it followed so quickly upon the uncouth rudeness of the shopman.

"I cannot speak my thanks, my heart is too full. I have been for some time in London, and I have met but little kindness."

The voice seemed to sink into the other's heart, deep with a burden of sad interest. Very full of sympathy, and agitated also, he replied—

"I am sorry for that. From what I have seen I am sure you feel unkindness very quickly, and so do I. Like you, I am poor—like you, terribly sensitive."

The kindness and tender tone, and the marked simplicity, wooed the other to such confidence as friend maketh unto friend.

"I am from the North—from beyond the Border; I came to London, hoping to obtain literary occupation, and, if possible, find a publisher for the manuscript of a volume of poems; and

things have gone hardly with me. It would almost seem that very life is begrudged one in this London. My God, how I yearn to be by the ingle-side at hame!" It was cried with a passionate outburst of grief and longing, and Rupert Redland, if any one, could imagine the depth of misery and unhappiness that had caused that hungering cry.

"Bear up," he said. It was difficult to comfort, knowing so well the experience.

"I have tried to," answered the other, with plaintive frankness; "prayed that I might; worked day and night on nothing but the hope that I might bear up; braced myself to that one attempt of keeping my courage up, and yet it will go down, and I feel filled with blank despair."

"And have you no relative or friend to encourage, or at least on whom you can fix thought awhile when too overburdened?"

"Ay, the mother and father, whom I dare not tell of it; for they cannot afford to come here, and would wish to, knowing my need. It was to win a subsistence for their old age I came hither to seek my fortune. There is peace there awa', an' I winna destroy it. God is good, I may do yet! But it seems that I've na chosen the right track. Poetry's a sorry reliance, sir."

"But a magnificent consolation. I don't know, but I am afraid there is little of it about myself; I am terribly solid and weighted with facts, and a grim reality that crushes the finer sentiments while leaving all the struggling discontent with the gross. Why do you not get into something temporarily, until you can turn round?"

"I have been long trying, but a shabby stranger from another country, of anything but business-like appearance, and without influence or money, finds it more arduous and difficult than should be possible in a Christian land. It is an upgang with bleeding feet, and nae progress with it all."

"One would think your face ought to plead for you; I shall never forget it."

Rupert was very candid, and times were very serious when two might interchange even such compliment without affectation on one side or vanity on the other.

"It was loved on the hillside," said the other with a sad smile, yet while a flash of pain came of the recollection; "folks havena time to love in London, nor to regard the plea of a softer face. It is rather against me when seeking a situation."

"Do you live near here?"

"Yes, but a few streets off, where the poor woman who keeps the house has been the one friend I have met with—the same shelter when I had not the wherewith to pay the week's rent, and a meal when I have been without."

"Oh, come, things are not quite hopeless while there is one with a kindly word. I cannot call on you now, but will do so and have a chat together. We're two awfully unfortunate ones, but, by God's help, may encourage one another; and it's a positive fact, two are stronger than one in London. We will knit our hands, friend, and though we are not able to turn the tide, we may go with it, supporting one another at the eddies."

The words and warm clasp of the hand carried new life with them, the eyes of the handsome stranger sparkled with rekindled hope, so much does but one heart feeling for us reinspire. Sympathy is nurture, and contact with goodness invigorates immediately.

"You have not given me your address, nor told me your name?"

"I am living at 5, Bridge Street, my name is Archie Campbell. And yours?"

"The name you heard me give in the shop—Rupert Redland, and your friend if you will permit it."

"The very thought of it cheers me!"

"Well, like you, I'm a poor frail one, but the two of us may make a way somehow, if not with the zest of these red-faced robust ones passing us."

They parted, with mutual pleasure at the meeting, both to some extent helped by it.

And now the unpleasant part had to come. There was some man to meet, face to face, eye to eye, of whom money had to be asked, and Rupert's tongue clove to the roof of his mouth with anticipation. It was so much more easy to give than to ask.

He had decided to ask Theodore Lute. He was different to the rest. Whether or not he responded, the request would be regarded in confidence, treated with delicacy, and forgotten instantly—of that he was assured; therefore he decided to go to Mr Lute if at the Club.

The gentlemen of the SHERIDAN looked up with surprise upon Redland's entrance, it was so seldom he was present in the evening. Rupert burnt hot on the cheek with memory of a recent commercial transaction; he could not meet their eyes just then, the play of the lights on their gold chains and glasses was sufficient. He saw Mr Lute at a table by himself, perusing the musical journals over his coffee, and went to him at once. Theodore shook hands cordially, very pleased.

"Good evening, Redland; an unexpected pleasure: you will join me?" And he requested the servant to bring coffee for Mr Redland likewise, which Mr Redland was by this time very glad of.

Their talk was upon the usual desultory topics. Theodore noticed his companion was not at ease, and leaning over the journal open before him, said, in a low voice and with thoughtful kindness, "You wish to speak with me,—am I not right?"

"I do, Mr Lute," replied the other, not yet relieved.

"Come for a stroll—or you go first, I will rejoin you at the end of the road in ten minutes, it may stop these people thinking anything of it."

This was one motive, and a highly thoughtful one: the other appeared after Redland had gone, when, at the expiration of some eight minutes, Mr Lute leisurely rose, crossed to another and more private room, and unlocked his desk, taking some bank-notes therefrom. Like all musically-strung people Mr Lute was sensitively quick at perception: he saw his friend was distressed, and in some embarrassment causing him suffering. Very leisurely he left the SHERIDAN, but once well without and away from view of its windows, joined Rupert with rapid strides. That young man awaited him with eagerness and dread.

"Now, Redland, what is the matter?"

"Perhaps I may tell you by detailing matters just as they have happened, without preface or explanation."

"Do so; I shall gain a clearer idea, and can put myself in your place."

"You would not care to do that," answered Rupert, with a sorrowful smile. He recounted the conversation with his uncle, as truthfully as memory would serve. Also the after meeting with the young Scotchman; and Theodore was much interested.

"Possibly he has some verse that may be pretty set to music; I'll call upon him. Now for your own dilemma, Rupert; kindly oblige me by accepting this!" He handed the other three five-pound notes. The long lashes were lifted once, and the composer rewarded by a look. More happy than for a long time past, and almost treading upon air, Rupert returned to his home, while Theodore betook himself to Bridge Street. His friend had so extolled the splendid face, the moving pathos of the voice, the gentle grace of the unfortunate poet, Theodore was eager to see him, and to try to better his prospects. Somehow he had conceived of one from beyond the Border as necessarily stalwart and strong, of fine and stately presence—a stature leaving the Southerners of pigmy build—an endurance before which privation fled stingless—a heroism that laid difficulty low, and stood on it the conqueror—a philosophy that, allied with the chivalry below the thistle, made light of trouble while preserving happy humour; but this Archie must be of a different order, so he went to him, somewhat curious, and very interested.

Meanwhile over the crucibles there was much rejoicing. Rupert handed his uncle four sovereigns, and it made the old man agreeable as never before. Rupert judged it prudent to hold the reserve in his own hand. So impatient was Mr Oliver he could barely wait for the morrow.

CHAPTER XI.

THE QUEEN OF THE CORN.

A SUNNY afternoon in August: a languid odorous air, laden with sweets: a hush, the bees alone disturbing the faint current.

A large old garden in August: disorderly splendour of late blossoms: fruit to the walls, jewel-like, fragrant, the softened ornament of southern paths.

Acres of grain in August: a sloping domain of tawny corn, level rows sheaved for the garner: much brilliance where poppies inlaid the stubble with rounded flecks of scarlet: some blue—the pity of the corn—the bouquet choice to Ceres: bared nests of the partridge, well hidden atween the ridges. It is harvest-time: the waggon team under the grateful trees whisk the flies off with their long tails: men and boys are outstretched resting, drinking from kegs of beer.

An old-fashioned well-built homestead, many coloured below the sun of August: a picturesque porch, clustered with pale mauve-blossoming clematis, fitted with rustic seats opposite one another, and on the seats daintily worked wool cushions,—on one of these a book laid down, on the other a small white dog asleep.

A wide hall: a stand, whereon many hats and caps, masculine, and one broad-brimmed leghorn, feminine: many whips and sticks and umbrellas, masculine, and one little sunshade, feminine. On the walls of the hall, old hunting pictures; at the end of the hall, a stand covered with flowers and ferns; by its side a trap, bat, and ball thrown carelessly down; oak-chairs, with high carved backs a barometer: to the left the

stairs, wide, highly polished, down which a rich carpet, over that a clean cover; to the right the parlour, spacious, cool in summer, draughty in winter however large the fire, but withal a comfortable room in August. Other rooms, a drawing-room and a dining-room, only used when visitors called or company were staying in the house, a rare event during harvest-time, when the farmer and his sons were too occupied to spare unnecessary absence from the fields.

Now this pastoral retreat, so well favoured and rich in abundance of all we associate with peace and with prosperity, belonged to Mr John Clark, who, in conjunction with his sons, farmed seven hundred acres, arable and pasture, reared stock, cultivated grain, and all with a zest; for they were moneyed men, business, honourable men, strong men, stalwart and ruddy, with tremendous appetites; strangers to a day's illness, suffering from the heat in these bright thirsty August days, but seldom losing temper over it; fond of their father as he was fond of them, and every man-Jack in love with their little cousin, sole female there—of course excepting the maids, a wonderful race, whom it will be as well perhaps to regard as non-female, so big and brawny and brown were they. Through the porch and hall, thus hearing of this maid amidst men, let us go search for her, and learn the sort of body seven sons love stoutly. Crept away into the larder or the pantry, for a sovereign? But we will hunt this pretty lady from amidst conserves and custards! Wrong; she is not there—save time to note how spacious, cool, and clean these rooms. Watching the bees perhaps? No; she was stung once, and has not favoured them with her company since. Very well, run up to the garret, a great though sloping low-roofed hiding-place, where all sorts of things, from apples for the winter, to picture-books used by those seven stalwart sons when boys, are stowed away. Find her here, for a kiss! And true as we live, it's so. Sitting like a Turk, munching the apples, turning over the leaves of a coloured picture-book, the pictures whereof represent old favourites of the boards, highly ornamented with tinsel, a Shakespearian quotation below each. She doesn't care much for the Shakespeare, but thinks Mr Edmund Kean wonderfully

fine in his black velvet and plumes, and Mr Macready more splendid than he, owing to his magnificent ermine-bordered cloak. This is bad, Miss! Seven such handsome cousins, kindly, spoiling thee fast, and thou hiding away up here with ermine-bordered heroes. It is not a nice place this garret, while so attractive a garden is outspread below. But Clark and his sons are busy at the harvest, and never a harvest in Suffolk gleams with a rarer gold, and never a harvest-supper is earned with a heartier will. And each knows well at close of the day, after the sun has set, and the father comes in with his pipe from the lawn, when curtains are drawn, and whist or draughts are on the table, each knows the delight of the evening time, and enjoys a foretaste of some domestic happiness perchance in store. But then they can't all have her, and liking her about equally, if these were not the good-tempered fellows they are, it might give promise of those bitternesses of which (as though the world were not full enough) we read so much. There is not a particularly good light in the garret, but by it is seen a young lady of exceedingly attractive appearance, notwithstanding the oriental attitude, and ravage of the apples, upon which and through which very even and pretty rows of teeth perform their work mercilessly. The hair is not arranged in any formal style, but as we see it all in disorder, it is, even so, luxuriant and beautiful. Her seventeenth birthday has passed, and she all day long seems struggling with the natural playful childhood, lingering exquisitely as so reluctant to bid adieu to this blithesome one, and the ladylike manners education confers. She is not a romp, nor a hoyden, although always in the society of the less gentle sex, and although filled with vivacious merriment and song. A favourite beyond the telling by words; it was Louise here, Louise there, until she well might be all over the place, flashing the beauty first upon one cousin's heart, next upon another. She came from school here, a twelvemonth since. John Clark paid for her schooling—the best money could pay for. Her father and mother are dead. This lovely old farmstead is her home, and she is the joy of every heart therein. John Clark's landlord called one day in the shooting season—

" 'And what did cousin Joseph do?' asked the Squire, who had been considerably astonished by the narration.

'Walked into the middle of the pond and brought me out in his arms,' said she, quietly."—PAGE 113.

rode over from the Herongate on his favourite blood-mare. The seven sons were in the fields, John Clark was at Ipswich market; but down by the duck-pond in the farmyard, Mr Masheter saw the unexpected vision of a fairy-like creature who seemed to him more attractive than any being he had, for a long season, set eyes upon. She was busily engaged in directing the first aquatic efforts of a brood of ducklings, and was so intently watchful over these that the hen upon whom had devolved the fostership strutted back to her nest contented. Contrasted with his pale and pensive invalid daughter, the Squire looked upon this splendid piece of youthful vivacity with emotion and admiring interest. A boy came up to hold his horse, and Cobham Masheter walked down to the pond, where, somewhat startled, Louise looked up, colouring, but little abashed.

"I discover you prettily engaged, young lady."

"I fell in yesterday, and came out wet and dirty."

The Squire laughed at the confidence; while Louise, undisturbed, regulated the movement of her brood with a hazel branch.

"And my friend, Mr Clark, was much alarmed, no doubt?"

"I did not tell uncle. He likes me to keep out of the yard. It's the second time I've fallen in."

"Is it really? And how may the former event have occurred?"

"I gave one of the men sixpence to roll a brewing-tub down. I put one of the gig-cushions on two hassocks and sat on it, rowing round with a clothes-prop. I'd lost two little ducks, and was afraid they had become entangled in the bushes over there. The prop was too heavy and overweighted me, and I tumbled out. Cousin Joseph saw me that time, though!" with a very demure air at the recollection.

"And what did cousin Joseph do?" asked the Squire, who had been considerably astonished by the narration.

"Walked into the middle of the pond and brought me out in his arms," said she, quietly. And the Squire, who much esteemed the stalwart worthy Joseph, thought reflectively over it afterwards.

"It must have been a lesson to you—it might have ended seriously."

"It did. I spoilt the best piece of pink ribbon I possessed, and I cried over it."

"Which grieved Mr Joseph?"

"He didn't see me; it was afterwards. But cousin Philip did, and begged me to tell him what I was crying about, and I did so. It was good of him to remember it. The very next market-day he brought me a new piece just like it."

"Oh, ho!" thought Mr Masheter, "the wind lies in an uncertain quarter!"

"I certainly do meet with most disagreeable accidents. I've been stung, you know."

"Indeed! You would not like that, I'm afraid."

"I should have been in pain till this time if it hadn't been for cousin Richard, who ran off for sweet-oil and the blue-bag, and made the place better almost directly." Three of her callow progeny were floundering about the entwined weed on the water's surface, and the owner of the Herongate watched their efforts to extricate themselves with unusual gravity for so simple a cause. The ingenuous young lady, delighted to have so pleasant a sympathiser, proceeded to tell him: "I do think the worst adventure I've had was up in the medlar-tree in the orchard."

"Bless me! Why, you don't climb trees?" The quiet-going Squire looked at the child with dismay.

"Not in the general way, it spoils my frocks. But one of the guinea-fowls flew up, and I fancied must have a nest there; so I climbed up to see, but I couldn't get down, and didn't till cousin Charles came to my release."

"It strikes me you must find a retinue of cousins, attached to your royal pleasure, extremely convenient, young lady."

"I wouldn't be without one of them; they are all *so* good to me, and I love them all so much."

And when, shortly afterwards, the Squire rode on to the ridges where those cousins worked—honest, simple-minded, genuine; not a pin to choose between them for excellent qualities, so far as the good old Saxon goes—he feared with

the fear of a warm and cordial regard that six of the seven would suffer. Brown-handed men with clean hearts; brown-complexioned men with a rugged nobility of character that came not of cities; negligent-dressing men; sturdy farmer's sons. Unused to fine customs; plain-speaking; Suffolk and Suffolk-English to the backbone; their landlord respected them. During the time he had held the property he had found none of the tenantry more worthy of respect. With rough courtliness they lifted their straw hats and greeted the owner of the estate.

This glimpse back will reveal a little of the childish love of adventure this young lady in the garret could not quite abandon, with all her accomplishments, daintiness of needle-work, and (when she pleased) lady-like manners.

It is very warm up in the garret, and she tosses her apples from her, for she has found an earwig in one of them, and will have none of it. She goes to one of the triangular windows and leans out, and sees a man walking rather wearily towards the house, wiping his brow with a red pocket-handkerchief while doing so: it is cousin James. And she goes and hides in the dusk behind the sloping rafters: she believes he plays truant awhile for a word with her, although some distance from the harvest-field, and does it in play to tease him. He comes up to the garret, pretends to look over the heaps for an apple to suit his fancy, and says, in a very low voice for so strong a man, "Louise!"

No answer. And he narrowly scans the area, but he has come out of the sunshine, and cannot see to the dusky parts; he goes to them, however, and finds her.

"So, kitten, hiding again."

"You wouldn't have all the game to yourself, cousin James? You seek me out; why shouldn't I hide? And what have you come home for, to-day? Let's see: yesterday it was the powder-flask; the day before, the cider; and on Monday, the reaping-hook or sickle. Which? It is fetch and go, cousin James; but if it comes to a kiss each time, I shall wax pale as the pippins there, and then what will uncle say?"

"*I* say that my cousin is too fond of apple-sauce; not even

to thank me for coming in to see you, and we want to clear up this evening."

"Well, you pleased yourself, sir. But now, come with me to the dairy, for I am going to help the girls at the churning."

"Do wait awhile, Louise; I want to talk to you about—about these bachelor's buttons I gathered for you from the hedge near the corn-field."

"Goodness, James! whatever for? I don't want them."

"No," said the other, with some confusion; "but I knew your love of wild flowers." A head was put in at the door, a burly one stooped and entered cautiously, and the girl merrily exclaimed—

"Well, cousin Robert, and what do you want?"

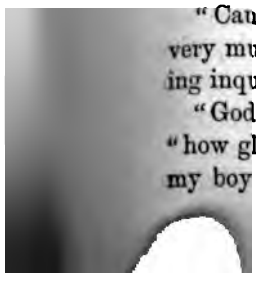
Cousin Robert saw his brother, and was a degree embarrassed. However, he got out of it by handing her a root and flower he carried. "I've brought you a root of the lords and ladies you were wanting; it's a very fine one." Then turning to his brother, "It's warm, isn't it?"

"Yes; I came up here to try and get cool. Louise is not half a bad judge, is she?"

"No," said the other cheerily, for cousin Louise had hold of the lords and ladies, while the bachelor's buttons were on the floor. "She generally retreats to the shadiest place."

"And yet it strikes me these tiles are hot; I think I'll be getting down again."

They all went down, and found the maid, who usually answered the door, parleying with an old white-haired gentleman, and a younger man. They were wishing to see Mr Clark; and when told that he was in the corn, they politely wished to sit down and wait until he came in to tea. Mr Clark's sons saw the strangers had driven over from somewhere,—an old-fashioned chaise was yonder under the trees.



"Can you tell me your business, please, for my father is very much occupied just at present?" Thus Mr James, looking inquiringly at the elder.

"God bless him!" said the old gentleman, benevolently; "how glad I am it's fine weather for you! Let me introduce my boy? Phineas, Mr Clark; Mr Clark, my son Phineas!"

Mr James's eyes were gradually enlarging with surprise, but he looked curiously at Phineas while he nodded.

"And now," proceeded the old gentleman familiarly, "I'll introduce myself: Phineas Beaver, sir—known to you by name, of course. For fifty-one years I was in business in the Strand; hat and cap manufacturer. Had the honour of once fitting your respected father, if I remember right; Clark, Ipswich; sent the box to Bishopsgate Station: any way, we've given up business now—retired, as they say. Now Phineas don't care for a warehouse; takes to farming. Looking out for a little place somewhere about here, where I can end my days, it struck me it would be a good thing if your father would take Phineas—of course with a liberal premium—and give him an insight into the business; make it pleasant; I living in the neighbourhood, if I can find a moderate-rented house."

Messrs Clark heard this cool proposition, not so much with surprise, for it is not an unusual transaction, as with a view to the inconvenience of it, there were so many of them already.

"I do not think my father would entertain it for a moment. I have six brothers."

"I know, 'We are seven!' Very beautiful! Fraternal love. God bless you!" and the hat manufacturer shook hands warmly with both brothers, then pushed his son slightly forward—"Shake hands, Phineas; you'll all be good friends enough, I can see. Will you let the lad put a net or cloth over the horse? the flies bite the poor thing terribly. I'll wait!"

"I really do not think it of any use, sir."

"Well, now, young gentleman, I never allow Phineas to speak for me in my absence. It is quite impossible for you to foresee the view your father may take of it: hoping you won't feel offended by my plainness."

"We are plain ourselves, sir, and like it best in others. No offence, be sure. We will walk over, at least, and tell our father you are here. You will excuse it if we do not return immediately?"

"Don't hurry, sir. I know all about business. It doesn't

do to neglect it. We'll take a turn in your splendid garden and wait your convenience. Now, Phineas, open the door for your father, sir."

The gentlemen went their separate ways: the visitors to their turn in the garden, where each dropped his part, and interchanged this singular dialogue:—

"As near as I can bring my lines of calculation to bear, it is on this farm somewhere."

"Flutter the seven if they suspected it."

"You'll have to be monstrously careful. They're an awkward party; not suspicious, but ingenuous, which is very nearly as bad."

"It's risky. But where am I to commence operations?"

"I should try the garden first."

"But what will they think?"

"You'll have your box o' bugs with you; if they condemn a taste for entomology they're not Christians."

"And in the fields?"

"You're fondness for geology, mineralogy, and meteorology is as strong and as admirable; if any one questions it, show 'em your case of aerolites."

During the interchange of this characteristic talk, they were minutely looking about them; nothing escaped their searching observation while walking about the garden. While thus engaged they saw to the left, advancing by a different way to that they had themselves come, two gentlemen of official appearance, carrying rods, a level, books, and papers. There was no mistaking their vocation.

"Sappers and miners surveying," said the elder. "It will never do for old Clark to be bothered in this way at harvest-time. I'll speak to them." He went to the fence and spoke to them over the rhododendrons. "Your pleasure, gentlemen?"

"Mr Clark?"

"The same, sir."

"We represent the Government Survey of England and Wales now being proceeded with; our ordnance directions will explain." Handing the white-haired gentleman a for-

midable-looking document, which the said gentleman courteously waived aside.

"Thank you, it is of no consequence; you cannot carry out your directions here."

"This opposition is somewhat unusual," said the other, politely; "we are reluctantly compelled to report refusals of this nature."

"You can please yourself, sir; the property is not altered since the last survey (which isn't so very long ago) and your shortest method will be to go to the coffee-room of your hotel in Ipswich, and there effect your measurement." And the pseudo-farmer turned away as though he had settled it, and, with his companion, went indoors.

Boggis and Blim looked at one another. It is a serious matter meeting with such a rebuff when acting for the Government. They slowly retraced their way, the others watching through the lace curtains. A hundred yards on, Blim, whose eyes were all about him, descried some distance off a horse and chaise, and a cunning smile played at the corner of his mouth. "Don't turn round," he said, urgently; "horse and vehicle waiting: we are forestalled; but they don't suspect, and we'll try again. It wasn't the farmer; just as I feared, we've all our work cut out."

"Saved by a squeak!" said the retired hat manufacturer. Mr Phineas, somewhat disgustedly, looked round the room.

"I hope they smoke."

"Give up your smoking for a while. If we're successful you'll be able to buy up all the cigars in creation, and smoke everybody else out of the universe. Hush-sh!"

The speaker heard a light footstep upon the oil-cloth: a pretty girl stood in the doorway, wearing a tasteful garden-hat, in which she had stuck some pheasant-feathers; a pet dog in her arms, blue ribbons and bells around its neck; a simple muslin dress of primrose colour, rather short sleeves, edged with lace, disclosing a delicate arm and a wrist more formed for harps than rowing about a pond in a tub with a clothes-prop for oar; around her white, well-shaped throat, a piece of black velvet, and a locket attached held portraits of her dead parents.

"Who the dickens is this?" thought Mr Beaver senior. He advanced with a most fatherly manner, his genial face beaming.

"Now, on my word, miss, you'll think me rude, but you make the subject for a very pretty picture. My son, here, sketches. What a charming drawing might be taken as you stand there now! Don't move, please: head a little to the right: that's it. Why don't you come forward, Phineas? There, sir, though I say it, is a subject worthy of your talent. And what a dog! My favourite breed, as I live! Permit me the honour of stroking your dog, and-er Phineas would like to stroke your dog."

Had Louise not heard something of the old gentleman's singularly free manner of conversing during the interview with cousins James and Robert, it is just possible she might have resented it; but these people rather amused her, and Louise was too accustomed to masculine society to feel abashed.

"You're coming to live about here? You won't like it after London. It seemed dull to me after coming from school at Kensington, but I've got used to it."

"Mr Clark's daughter, I presume?"

"His niece. But I fill a daughter's place, and, I am sure, receive a daughter's love!" It was said so gratefully, the old gentleman looked with benign interest at the girl, while in a low voice he reverently murmured, "God bless him!"

"I was just going to run down to the field, if you don't mind,—I want to have a ride home on the waggon."

"Charming creature," said the old gentleman as the girl fled to the garden, and thence to the high-banked, flower-strewn Suffolk lane, where birds were busy with leavings of the waggons caught on the hedge-side trees. It was cool in the lane; the umbrageous foliage nearly meeting overhead formed a natural awning shielding it from the sun. Along one side ran a rivulet, where forget-me-nots grew, rushes and reeds, and the usual water-plants, and the surface was skimmed by frail-winged dragon-flies in the evening. It was a picturesque retreat, seldom intruded upon, although one of the ways from

hamlet to hamlet; but this afternoon she was surprised to observe an elderly and exceedingly handsome gentleman, deeply engaged in the attentive office of binding a white silk pocket-handkerchief around the knee of his horse, a superb animal. A sharp fall had cut the limb severely, and he was thinking more of this than of his own wounds and bruises, disagreeable though they were. He looked up with considerable pleasure at the beauteous vision, but did not desist from his employment; and it was evident from the lightness exercised, and the elegant hand manipulating the bandage, that this was a gentleman of fine degree. The girl paused a moment, and with coyness said, "The maids at the house will give you some warm water if you would like to bathe its leg."

"I thank you, young lady, and accept the offer very gladly: it is a favourite mare. Poor Rosine! We have done many a hundred miles without any such misadventure."

"Perhaps it's a new Dick Turpin," thought Louise, who had not long since parted with the redoubtable hero up in the garret, and she looked much prepossessed at the attractive stranger. Thought gave birth to speech prematurely in every instance with this young lady, and she said, "Are you a highwayman?" It caused the elegant traveller some confusion, and he muttered, "Pleasant, upon my word,—appearances are against me, I fear." Then addressing the pretty stranger, he asked if the gentlemen of the farm were at home? She replied they were all in the field, carting; then he asked how far it was to the house, looking pityingly at Rosine.

"Come back with me, and I'll bathe it for you," she said; "the girls haven't got hands for touching such beautiful legs as those."

And he thought the better of her for that, and certainly considered her very piquant. At slow progress they went on, she running into the kitchen, while he stayed by his horse in the yard. She quickly returned with a snowy bowl, and warm water, soap, and sponge. "You are really very good!" he remarked, gratefully.

"And pretty as well, my cousins tell me!" with a *naïf*

toss of her head to shake stray curls from her eyes. With some disappointment and annoyance. he asked, "You haven't men cousins?"

"Haven't I? You should see; seven of them, each six feet two with his coat off, working like negroes in the harvest-field!" The gentleman gave a sigh of intense repugnance, he disliked the male sex so much. "Will you lead your horse this way, please?" Two little hands on the bowl, two large eyes on the handsome horseman: she wheeled round and led the way to the cleanest of Messrs Clark's stables. He was so grateful for her kindness: did not make a fuss of his appreciation, but thought the more of it. His was the thankfulness very acceptable to the majority of people—little said, a warm clasp of the hand, and a magnificent diamond ring or some other costly bauble left in the other's hand. It was Lord Gascoyne, then on a visit to his cousin Masheter of the Herongate, by whom he was much esteemed for his genuine character, and honour unsullied as his escutcheon.

It was no uncomely picture! That courtly man leaning an elbow upon his horse, looking down with chivalrous admiration upon the child so softly removing the dust and blood from the wounded part. As though conscious of the privilege of being tended by so gentle a being, the animal remained docile and still.

"Will you leave it here, please, until my uncle comes home, when he will tell you if it can remain awhile until the place heals? I don't know how they're off for room."

"Well, thank you, until our friend comes I shall certainly be glad. I am staying with your neighbour, Mr Masheter, and will send my servant over here for the mare. And now do you wish me to go, or to remain until your uncle arrives?"

He was looking wistfully into her clear beautiful eyes.

"Stay, of course, if you would like to thank my uncle for the soap used!" with mischievous wickedness. "But you cannot remain here; come indoors. I am going to the field; they finish with this load, and I want to ride home on it." Playful and innocent! It was apparent in every movement, conveyed by every word. It was just possible this riding home on the

waggon-load might present a picture of grace instead of the rude tom-boyish affair his first thought suggested. He would like to see it, and said so.

"Would you!" she cried with delight; "then come along and you shall!" And tripping on, she daintily sang, "For I'm to be Queen of the Corn! For I'm to be Queen of the Corn!" And really he felt as familiar as though having known her through childhood. It was not the familiarity of ill-manners, rather the breeding that would be content with half an inch in lieu of the proverbial tension.

It was very romantic so long as the shady lane lasted, she and her knight, and much he would have liked it longer, but anon they turned from it into grass-land, and thence into the corn-fields. Men were hard at work there, the farmer with a hand everywhere; and his sons, brawny and brown, working with the best. This gentleman did not like work, indeed he scarcely understood it, never having attempted anything of the sort; and he was not particularly attached to people who worked; thought them slightly offensive, if necessary; but when he saw the strong brown men going at it with such zest and vigour, and thought of this fragile lily-girl in the possession of such a satyr-like crew, it was too much for him, and saying, "No, thank you!" to himself, and "I find I cannot bear the heat!" to her, with marked respect, and a bow a study of itself, he departed.

"I can stand a good deal," he said, talking to himself, walking back, and certainly very warm, "but that herculean body-guard is too formidable. How lovely she is! I'll ask Masheter if he knows anything about her!" When he reached the house, three maids approaching in Indian file with milk-pails stared hard and marched on, with the massive tread of a Highland picket. "Queer race of people about here,—unnaturally elongated!" While so musing, he was much startled by the appearance of a white-haired, benevolent-looking old gentleman, who came out with all the assurance of a host, and greeted him with friendly cordiality, greatly to Lord Gascoyne's disgust, for he entertained aversion for exuberant people.

"Good day! Glad to see you! Something in the farming

way, I suppose? We are alike, sir, in our regard for the beautiful operations of nature; we both hold husbandry to be the primary dispensation: we will shake hands over this!"

"I am obliged to you," said Lord Gascoyne, coldly; "I give my hand to but few people, and always require to know those for very many years first."

"The deuce you do!" The old gentleman stood off, and, hands on hips, contemplated the speaker with real or assumed interest. "And a very good rule, too, amongst people you haven't had a reference with; but I'll give you mine: Phineas Beaver, Hat Manufacturer, Strand, London. I should judge you've been in the wholesale,—if so, you know our place; business changed now, Vienna Beer! I've fitted many a silk on heads like yours, and how you can wear that deer-stalker is more than I can understand, for it don't become you, take my word for it. Ah, here's my boy Phineas! Phineas, shake hands with the gentleman, friend of our friend Clark's."

Really alarmed, Lord Gascoyne preserved his presence of mind, and walked away, resolving not to venture again beyond the precincts of the Herongate, not even to see once more the captivating little nymph of the woodlands. He caught sight of a maid of more domestic appearance, and accosted her, requesting she would give Lord Gascoyne's respects to Mr Clark, say he was greatly obliged, and would send his servant over for the horse; and then without further interruption he walked on for the Herongate. It was some distance, but the way was shady, and he performed the exercise at infinite leisure, thinking more continuously than he would have deemed possible of his new acquaintance.

And the object of his thoughts, with tingling ears, hot cheeks, and some crossness (for the harvest insects irritated her delicate skin), was sitting under an oak, fanning herself with a dock-leaf, while many a glance watched and hearts beat quicker than the hoisting of sheaves warranted. Row after row was cleared before the strong labour of the men, whose ardour redoubled as the finish became near, with the harvest-supper in view at its close. The Suffolk waggon is a heavy contrivance, some twelve feet long. It carries ten

quarters of wheat in the ordinary way; but although a horse's draught heavier than the Berkshire and other waggons, it carries less,—in short, it is unnecessarily cumbersome, requiring five horses—a breed peculiar to the county, known as the Suffolk Punch. And stout, strong, and useful animals they are, although small, being generally under fifteen hands and a half, yet withal excellent draught-horses, with open chests, and shoulders well for the collar, finely arched across the loins, with short couples, and full well-shaped quarters. A double team of these honest pullers were waiting under the trees, and while the girl employed herself at whisking from them the flies, in the intervals between fanning herself, she mentally saw the graceful Rosine, and somehow did not admire these sturdy old roadsters quite so much as she had been wont.

They had dined late, and would finish to the last sheaf before going on to tea. The heat diminished gradually and made it pleasanter to work. On the distant acres, bare now, of late all waving with proud heads of the richest brown, the gleaners are seen; women and girls, quaint in sun-bonnets, some few of the children pretty as pictures. These moved swiftly over the ground, stooped, gathering up the stalks and broken ears, talking little, keen looks hither and thither. Their pockets or bags filled, they catch up their print aprons and frocks and store them likewise: they must be quick, or the birds and mice will do the work for them.

The sunshine becomes slanting, and through the close blackthorn, and more remote hazels, Louise has the blaze of sunset in her eyes. It will be a grand sun-setting, she thinks, and she is right, and gains a finer view of it anon when seated in state on the last load of the year's corn; more grand it could not have been. The jolting progress was slow, and while her cousins walked either side the horses with more eyes for her than for the sunset, her own were upon the majestic stages of the pageant upon the horizon.

The west was aflame. Rose and ruby streaks formed radii of glory about a seeming throne of burnished gold. Yellow cloudlets edged with pink more delicately vivid than the lining of a shell, were marshalled up with almost military

regularity. A festooned magnificence of still more splendid colour glowed above, shading off into the blue with myriad tints of more than opal variance, whilst a crowded foreground of grouped bouquets of changing crimson flashed into brilliance with every minute's sinking of the sun. It was upon the eve of disappearing when the sun completed the crowning beauty of his royal progress. Slowly descending behind a range of purple peaks rearing in relief from the glittering back, it shot rays of flame over the entire circle, and emerged more dazzling than ever, bursting as it were from between the purple range, which parted its entire band to admit of the dying blaze, and as he gradually succumbed to the inevitable, the sky became a field of colour, an intricacy of chaste tinting. The bold flash and glitter toned to hues of sweeter shading. The islands, with their pale golden shores netted in the lace-work, reposed like gilded barges in still waters. The mountain-range broke up and calmly floated off into the blue beyond. Swiftly the pageantry of colour paled to the grey—the symbol of repose. The retinue of the monarch of six thousand years is quick to follow in his train. All the prose in one's nature cannot quench the influence of such a scene, and there are sunsets in our histories even like epochs, so woven with the magnificence and colour are associations of the time.

We Saxons have little impressive and awe-inspiring spectacle in nature, and should esteem the glorious sunsets, which may be witnessed to superior advantage, but never can be of themselves surpassed.

The poets paint these. Happiness of illustration, felicity of figure, appositeness of metaphor, and tact in comparison, determine the loftiness of their standard, and form the check upon its perfection; but who amongst men can paint the sunset with graphic verity?

CHAPTER XII.

A HARVEST-SUPPER.

"WALKING?" cried Mr Masheter with surprise, when his relative appeared on the garden-drive, and on foot.

"The mare has had a fall: I've left her at a farm near by."

"You are not bruised, I trust?" inquired the kind-hearted Squire, anxiously.

"Nothing to speak of. Quite an adventure, take it altogether, and introduced me to the prettiest girl I've seen for many a long year."

"Well, upon my word, becoming quite a gallant in your old age! And who, amongst my neighbours, can be honoured with so much admiration?"

"Her uncle's name is Clark, and there appears to be an indefinite number of other Clarks, the use of whom I fail to see."

Mr Masheter laughed heartily. "You have fallen in with that young sprite! I agree with your judgment. She is exceedingly good-looking; and her youth and *naïveté* lend piquancy."

"She strikes me as being a curious sort of child: unsophisticated while cultivated, and ingenuous while modest."

"You are aware she climbs trees, I suppose?"

"No! Good gracious! But you are not serious?"

"And rows about the pond in a brewer's tub with a clothes-prop, during which she once upset herself and would have been drowned but for one of the useless Clarks aforenamed."

A perfectly indescribable expression marked his lordship's heed of this impressive exposure; then, drawing a deep breath,

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he observed, with gravity, "I am glad I came down to Suffolk. I am about entering upon prolonged travels. This county will prepare me for anything."

"Oh, but you have seen our little friend under disadvantageous circumstances."

"On the contrary, she has taken the part of a good angel. If my horse does not soon get about again after the tender care she displayed while dressing its wounds, it is less sensitive to kindness than I have always found to be the case."

"I am delighted, I'm sure, for I hold her friends in cordial regard. At once my best and oldest tenants, they have improved the land until it is of much higher value. I need not tell you that any landowner, with respect for his property, prefers occupation of this thrifty nature to the incompetency and inexperience frequently seen."

"After which imposing assurance kindly inform me, now that you are in the explanatory mood, what the Beaver has to do with it?" The question was perplexing. Cobham Masheter asked to have it repeated. Either he had lost something, or hadn't found something, and could, no way, make it out.

"Old white-haired man—used to make hats. Wanted to shake hands. Awful scarecrow whom he called Phineas."

"I think we had better sit down over this," said Mr Masheter, with concern. "I don't know whether it's the Tunbridge waters, or breaking up of a naturally fine constitution, but my reasoning powers don't seem as clear as I should like. There appears to me to be a link missing in your discourse, but I may be wrong."

"I was bothered just the same when at the farm; but I felt so morally certain those Phineas people were lunatics and not I, that it necessitated immediate retreat, or else I was waiting to thank Mr Clark for my use of his stable."

"You can do so this evening." His lordship looking surprised, Mr Masheter explained: "When at home during its event I look in on their harvest-supper—a little attention they appreciate. If so disposed, you can accompany me."

"Your daughter will be alone." Lord Gascoyne was always thoughtful for the gentle invalid.

"We shall not be away longer than an hour. I was on the Continent last year, and the year before, at Scarborough; thus I would rather not miss putting in an appearance for half an hour. But if it will bore you——"

"On the contrary; I shall like it. Never saw anything of the kind. Only do not let those Amazons of the dairy approach too close."

"I think you will be quite safe," said Mr Masheter, laughing. "You do not understand; the labourers' revelry is distinct from the rejoicings in the house."

. . . . . .

Meanwhile, at the farm, the waggon had arrived in the yard, and Louise descended from her enthronement. Leaving his men to complete their work, Mr Clark and his sons went into the house, where in the kitchen a refreshing ablution and exchange of boots for slippers, preceded a march up-stairs; then, in their several rooms they brushed their untidy heads of hair, and finally joined the guests in the parlour. Mr Phineas Beaver senior, was a little fat man, red in the face, and uncommonly genial; and when he trotted out to meet the army, although his presence was not awe-inspiring, it was eminently conciliating. There was marked benevolence, and an absence of hypocrisy that pleased Mr Clark very much.

"Bless my soul! Thought I should know you again. How well you've worn! Remember me, of course, although so many years ago? Ah, the old cattle-market in Smithfield was in its prime then! Lost a lot of my best customers with its removal. Phineas was a lad when you were in. But you remember Mr Clark, Phineas—the gentleman who gave you half-a-crown? Shake hands with Mr Clark, Phineas!"

Mr Clark thought there was a little mistake, but shook hands with Phineas. His visitor was so very familiar, it seemed unwise to contradict him.

"Your noble sons! God bless me! How like you are to Jacob! And this—yes, this is Mr Joseph! Phineas, shake hands with Mr Joseph!"

The noble sons stood all together by the door with Jacob a pace in advance, and as the Beavers swam in and out with their congratulations and greetings, the effect was slightly ludicrous.

"Tell you what I've come for, Mr Clark. I'm going to be a near neighbour of yours, and Phineas being anxious to learn the farming, I make bold to come and see if you're willing to take him, naming your own premium?"

Mr Clark considered, while his sons seated themselves stolidly here and there about the room.

"Well, Mr Beaver, I was about to decline it on the score of convenience. But really, with all the space we still have to spare, I don't see why I should. So I've no objection to your son coming for a time; and the premium-money I'll talk to you about."

"Thank you, sir. Then we may consider it settled; and you'll find my boy uncommonly tractable—willing to learn and eager to lay his hand on all he can. I shall miss parting with him, but it is for his good, and when the cap fits, Mr Clark, wear it."

The old gentleman was blowing his nose, and the farmer did not quite comprehend whether his evident agitation was the result of parting with Phineas or the heat of the weather. But holding a creed that hospitality is the sovereign cure for everything, he said: "If you don't mind, friend, we'll have the tea in, and shall feel glad of your company."

Mr Beaver, with delightful cordiality, at once assented. "You're like me when I was in business, always glad to see friend or stranger who'd drop in to tea. Let's see; which is Mr Richard? Ah, to be sure. I take especial interest in you, sir. His poor mother wished my Phineas to be named Richard, after the immortal Whittington. It was not to be. But you would feel surprised to see his fondness for cats. Cats! do I say? Anything, from May-bugs to shooting-stars! Always has his cases of specimens with him everywhere. Have to send 'em on in the morning. Metals, minerals, I don't know what the dickens there is he doesn't understand in the science way."

The servant, who was setting the tea, here informed her master that an old gentleman at the gate wished to speak with him.

"Well, ask him to come in, girl."

"If you please, he has a great carpet-bag with him, and can't leave it, and would rather not bring it up to the house, because it is heavy."

"Tell him we don't want anything."

"Oh, if you please, he speaks like a gentleman!"

"Carry the bag in for him, and tell him I will see him here. I am too tired to get up now I've once sat down," to Mr Beaver, who had been highly interested during this parley, and who now expressed his kindred feeling on the back question, "Reason why I gave up business, couldn't stand it."

It really seemed as if the individual ushered in had more just plea than either of them to complain, for he was bent by age or aching bones, or long and toilsome walking, and looked both worn and ill, but there was a gentility and refinement of demeanour about him that impressed Mr Clark immediately. Like all kind souls he was regardful for age, and this old gentleman looked sorely in need of a cup of tea, but first he would hear his account of himself, which might or might not be satisfactory. Directly he spoke, however, it was evident he must be a person of cultivation and knowledge.

"You will excuse my troubling you. Engaged in scientific inquiry, and knowing how interesting this part is, I hoped to find a comfortable inn, but after long walking, and ready to drop with fatigue, I am disappointed and almost afraid to push on, night drawing near; or to retrace my way, the distance being so great,—I ventured to think, perhaps, one of your cottagers, on a word from you, might allow me to remain the night if I paid them for it."

"First you shall have a cup of tea, old gentleman, with a drop of brandy in it; afterwards we will talk of where you're to go. Bag too heavy for you, I suspect, to carry far?"

"Very heavy; it contains my scientific instruments. I am obliged to bear them about with me, as I am continually wanting them, and they become injured in other hands."

"Some more gentlemen here in the science way. May-bugs and shooting-stars didn't you say, Mr Beaver?"

"I? Oh yes! Phineas, you mean; very clever at it. I daresay now he'd like to see in that bag,—he's an awful one for scientific instruments! Perhaps we've heard your name, sir? we've moved much in scientific circles!" He was narrowly observing the old man's face, while with bland and benevolent manner he thus inquired his name. That old man's face did not move a muscle while he replied, "My name is Landred. I have no doubt you have heard of it."

"Landred! Landred!" repeated the Beaver, reflectively. Then exclaiming, "Wasn't it you who discovered the famous toad in the rock? Bless me, no! what the dickens am I thinking of! At my old game, Phineas boy, mixing names up somehow, anyhow, and nohow!"

With all the kindness of his host the old gentleman did not seem quite at his ease, and his piercing eyes under pent brows took on a strangely watchful look. However, he made himself very agreeable, and when the time came to settle his whereabouts for the night, upon considering it, Mr Clark did not know any cottage to which he would like to send him, or at which he could be entertained if sent. Therefore Mr Clark told him he could remain beneath their roof, and instructed one of the servants to see that a room was prepared for his use.

During tea Louise filled her accustomed office, presiding; afterwards she retreated. She did not mind her cousins, because used to them, but when it came to a variety of strangers, and, in her opinion, disagreeable strangers, she would rather not; besides, she was thinking very deeply of the fascinating horseman.

The old gentleman intimated his wish to go to bed, as very wearied, and an habitual early riser.

"Ah," said Mr Clark, approvingly, "you're like us; we always go to bed at half-past nine, and we're up with the sun!"

The old gentleman was bidding all "good night" *en masse*, when Mr Beaver called out paternally, "Phineas would like to shake hands with you, sir!" And Phineas dutifully arose to

do so, meeting the old gentleman half-way, holding his palm close, and looking under those shaggy grey brows; then with a perfectly filial respect wishing the elder in science a very good night.

"You play cribbage, of course, sir?" asked Mr Clark, anxiously of their visitor, after the old gentleman had retired. Mr Clark entertained small respect for people who did not play cribbage.

"I? Oh, very fond of it! But I'm afraid you're an old soldier. I shall stand but little chance of winning."

The conscious smile playing upon the farmer's face would have convinced any person of his depth, while the guileless simplicity worn by the countenance of Mr Beaver would equally have testified to his risk of losing all the games. As a matter of interest, incidental to the sport and pastime in this book, he did lose every game, putting John Clark in such good humour that he brought his hand down on the other's shoulder with a force that caused a singular expression to cross his face.

"You'll have to come and see us often, Mr Beaver, to pick up your science!" and the farmer laughed jovially.

"It's wonderful how one may drop a thing, but I hope to pick it up before I've done with you!" And equally as jovially the hat manufacturer accepted his losses in a spirit of good-humoured philosophy.

After a pipe or two it was time to look in on the festival.

The largest area available was in the brew-house, where, when vats and tubs were placed one inside another, a spacious interior was obtained. Tables from the kitchen, larder, and dairy, forms from the church close by, some stools from the kitchen, and one of the oak high-backed hall chairs at the head for the master; some rude decoration in the form of festoons of laurel cuttings, saved purposely from the last clipping of the garden-shrubs, to which one of the men had added corn-flowers, poppies, and wheat-ears; tables well spread and well lighted up, roast beef and plum-pudding, and great jugs of foaming home-brewed ale. There was no stint on these annual nights of harvest-supper, and it would have hurt the

feelings of their master to have known that any one of them was not partaking at his heartiest.

Men and boys were around the tables impatient to begin, when John Clark walked in, followed by his sons, and a ringing cheer greeted them, sufficiently testifying to the regard in which they were held. Suffolk labourers are obstinate in working well for the master they like, and as obstinately troublesome when their prejudices are aroused against one. Mr Clark took his seat at the table, and lifting a huge carving-knife brought the handle down on the table with a rap, commanding instant attention.

"We are spared to meet again in this place, my men, after another prosperous ingathering, and our grateful thanks are due to that good Providence who has enabled this to be done. A favourable season has produced one of the finest crops ever stacked upon this farm; we have enjoyed excellent health; stock losses have been slight; dairy produce has kept its price; orchard supplies have been plentiful. My friends, our first thanks are due to Providence; next I thank you all, men and maids, for your industry. You have worked with a will; we have worked together, and this is the secret of success!"

A hearty cheer followed this, which pleased them. Then the farmer said grace, and cut vigorously into the prime joint which garnished the head of the table. After the first distribution he gave place to his eldest son, and returned to the house with the others. There a bountiful table awaited them, Louise attired in her best, looking exceedingly lovely. The perennial Beavers, bland and agreeable as ever.

"We have lost you a long time, my dear."

"I have been in the kitchen, and up-stairs, uncle."

"Well, now sit down, and let us see if we can do justice likewise to a supper."

Louise used to divide her company very fairly, sitting beside one cousin one day, and another cousin the next, and so on. Upon this occasion it was Mr Robert's turn. Mr Robert looked as though he wished his turn had come upon a day when not exposed to the quizzing eyes of the Beaver tribe.

"Sorry the old gentleman isn't with us," said John Clark, hospitably.

"I suspect a bed is of more interest to him just now," replied Mr Beaver, feelingly.

It was. The scientific Landred was at that time digging with the deepest interest low down in a flower-bed by tradition, but long since given over to weed-culture extraordinary. No light save the lingering reflections that lie on August skies before the stars are seen. Working with soundless care, crouching low, and hidden by the shrubs. This part of the garden was quite away from the beautiful extent seen from the windows.

"Sit down, sir," said the host to Phineas junior, who had not yet taken his seat.

"If you'll excuse me, I've heard Suffolk is famous for bats. I should like to have a glimpse of one before sitting down, it may be late by the time we leave the table."

"Ah, do, my boy. He has some very fine specimens from other parts," added Mr Beaver in confidence to their host. But John Clark, if particular about any one thing on earth, was particular about being kept waiting at his own table, and would have none of it.

"Sit down, please. Never mind the bats, or at all events until after supper."

Mr Phineas sat down with rather a surly expression. On many counts Mr Clark's sons felt not to take kindly to this young man, and resolved on the morrow to protest against the contemplated arrangement.

They had just commenced supper when a servant announced "Mr Masheter, please, and a gentleman." Mr Clark hurried to the hall to greet his landlord.

"This is very kind, sir. I hope I see you well. Let me take your hats."

"Thanks. I thought I would look in on you. My relative, Lord Gascoyne! I'm very well, much obliged. And how are you and the bonny boys?"

"You shall see; come in, Mr Masheter."

They entered, and the party rose. From mention of Mr

Masheter's name and *a gentleman*, the young lady with seven cousins had blushed warmly. Lord Gascoyne at once went to her and shook her hand with extreme pleasure, turning to her uncle with a graceful explanatory movement, "I am greatly indebted for the good service rendered me this afternoon, Mr Clark. This young lady kindly gave me your consent to stable my horse."

"Of course, and since then I have sent one of my men for the veterinary surgeon, who has been to see the cut, and he is of opinion it had better remain quiet a day or two, if you will leave it in our care."

"This is very kind, really!" said his lordship.

"Very kind!" repeated Cobham Masheter.

But a black thunder-cloud was gathering on the horizon of six. Unlike their uncle, they knew nothing of the connection of their little cousin with the adventure.

"May we ask you to join us at the table, or perhaps we shall follow too closely on your dining-hour?"

"Not at all! Very pleased. I may speak for my relative also, I think."

"I shall be delighted," replied his lordship, seating himself on the left of Miss Clark. He would on no account have disturbed cousin Robert on the right.

A succession of cheers to the rear caused Mr Masheter to smile. "They are drinking your health and your sons'. Not every Englishman can boast so fine a staff."

His lordship looked with ill-concealed distaste upon the staff. "Do you go nutting in your woods sometimes?" he asked softly, while handing his plate for some potato.

"Not unless one of my cousins goes with me," she answered as softly, handing back the plate. But the eloquent admiration expressed by the eyes of this handsome elderly nobleman could not but impress one even as unsophisticated as was Louise. It did not confuse, nor particularly please her, but the impression was there. And upon his side, the more Lord Gascoyne saw of the girl, the more he really and truly admired her.

CHAPTER XIII.

SNAPPER, BULLTACK, AND ACKRIFT: MARINE-STORE AND CURIOSITY DEALERS.

THAMES-SIDE districts are not savoury; nor safe, in some quarters. Immediately in the vicinity of the basin connecting the Thames with London Dock, are a variety of disreputable lanes, which have given Wapping a *prestige* of its own, and with which no other neighbourhood need desire to interfere. From Hermitage Dock to Thames Tunnel there is a circular wharfing of every representative loathsomeness under the sun. From Wapping Old Stairs to Wapping New Stairs, is a memorable piece of bank by any light. Between Great Hermitage Street and Green Bank and King Street (which run about parallel with the water) and the river-side proper, will be found a congregated mass of disgraceful dwellings, tenanted by an amphibious colony settled amidst these courts and lanes.

If you turn to the right after leaving Union Stairs, various curious marts may be seen, resembling those of the low quarter of Liverpool, chiefly marine-store dealers, with a tavern at every other corner. In such localities the marine-store dealer performs the function allotted to pawnbrokers in the other poor quarters. These dealers thrive on bits of iron, rope, cordage, wood, rag, bottles, and whatsoever else may be found in the water or on the bank, duly taken to the dealers by the finders, and exchanged for a few halfpence. Some of the dealers take in curiosities, and singular enough are their collections to any one who has sufficient daring to penetrate and take a glimpse round.

One August evening a man, who, although meanly dressed,

presented a counterfeit air of poverty, turned to the right after leaving Union Stairs, and assuming a slouching gait, natural to the loafers about these parts, stared round him with a stupid kind of interest. Apparently the marine stores did not exactly merit his attention, although, when unobserved, he darted a quickly examining glance in window and shop. Presently he came to a dealer of the other sort, whereat swung a board like a tavern-sign with this announcement:—

SNAPPER,

MARINE-STORE DEALER.

Old Curiosities Bought.

He turned in here, went through a terrifying accumulation of rubbish, and saw at the far end of the lumber-place a shrivelled wizened old man, wearing a grim pair of spectacles, over which he peered; his sharp face grotesque and weird. Truly he might have been brought in with one of the lots and set up in that corner where the customer found him. Sometimes names fit astonishingly, and this marine-store and old curiosity snapper seemed endowed with a manner to suit his name, and name to suit his manner, so jerky and snapping was his method of transacting business and replying to his patrons. The customer did not at once state his wants, but looked round, whereupon Mr Snapper surlily snapped—

"Didn't pay at th' door, did yer?"

"I didn't," replied the customer, with corresponding brusqueness.

"No! 'cause 'tain't a exhibition!"

"Don't know so much; seems to be something of everything."

"Perhaps you'll say whether you're going to add to it?"

"No, I'm not. I've come to see if I can buy an old iron canister or box of you; summat as will store letters and papers for a voyage?"

Mr Snapper was sitting down, and did not trouble himself to get up, but looking with more interest over his glasses, he answered, "There's an old spice-box yonder, but I s'pose it wouldn't be big enough?"

"No. Is it the biggest case of the kind yer got?"

"Nothing in the shop bigger. You're welcome to look round the yard, turn out at yon door." The visitor did so, looking about him sharply. It was a strange sight that yard. From anchors to meat-safes, from girders to ploughshares, from mattocks to flat-irons, from huge rings to rusty bolts, from coal-cellar lids to pig-troughs, from boilers to cash-boxes, and when he came to the box department, the customer displayed interest, although guarded. He picked up a long bar with a hook at the end of it, and fished amongst the heap of brown-red cases, for the greater number were rusted over: he upset them, crooked them upside down, until the lids flew open and cockroaches fell out. This was his design—to ascertain if any one of the heap was locked—not one of them, and he returned to the old man in the shop.

"I don't see one that'll suit me, thank ye."

"Didn't suppose you would; 'spects th' ironmonger's more in your way."

"Ay, but they wants their price. Thought you might have found me a reasonable concern as would have done."

"Should think you'd do well to try furder; there's another shop up the next lane where there's a deuce of a jumble, an' more money to buy sich, I recken, for I wouldn't be choke full of a store like that to serve the Queen's majesty!"

"I'll be getting on up there—find what I want, perhaps."

The customer strode out. From his obscure crouching-place in the duskiest corner of the den, Snapper could see the doorway as a clear opening at the end of a vista of piled-up and hanging rusty iron, could see the figure of the man more plainly defined there; it was but for an instant, yet so keen were those peering eyes they detected that change from the assumed slouching gait to more rapid striding. Swift to piece together small evidence, these Thames-side dealers are endowed with the shrewd faculties of natural detectives.

"Box missing—wouldn't be empty: have a look round while he's yonder." Having disinterred a rusty and dusty female, whose province it was to look to the shop while Snapper was looking round, he set forth on a small journey of exploration. His late customer meanwhile had reached the lane to which he was directed, and mid-way therein saw another sign-board in full swing, and upon it this information:—

BULLTACK'S

MARINE STORES.

Curiosities Bought.

He turned in at Bulltack's, and quite agreed with his informant. The jumble was astonishing! Bulltack, proprietor, was mending a pair of scales, which he let fall with a thundering din at the appearance of a possible customer.

"Morning, sir," said the possible customer civilly; "have you a box or case of iron suitable for roughing it?"

Bulltack was an individual of Titanic build, burly and fierce, with a coarsely brutal mode of conducting and expressing himself eminently adapted to the locality, and advantageous, doubtless, to his business. He opened a huge mouth, disclosed rows of vicious-looking teeth, iron-like and weaponous, and growled, "It's a iron case yer want, is it? Dessay I can do it for ye!"

Then he led the way to a dark corner, stooped, pulled up a trap, took a lantern and piece of tallow candle, lighted it, disclosed horrible-looking steps, and with a ponderous tread that shook them to the foundation, descended, roughly bidding his companion to follow. It was a shocking region below; a chaos of bulky work, the manes of utensils and articles that had long since left the region of daylight. The visitor looked about him, chilled, and was not reassured by the mighty being wielding the lantern, the light of which, gleaming along his muscular sinewy arm, yellow, brown, scarred, and on the

broad stolid face, imparted the aspect of some giant of the nether world, whose subterranean works this cellar might be. The explorer, of his marine-store acquaintance, preferred Snapper. He invariably preferred one with whom in event of a tussle there would be no doubt as to the issue being favourable to himself.

Arrived at the centre of chaos, the man of bulk turned sharp, swung the lantern out before him, causing his customer's eyes to blink with its suddenness, stood massive, bull-like, broad, and from the breadth hurled a question that seemed to take rusty form and glower upon the bedazzled intruder.

"Now, perhaps you'll say what it is you really wants, without beating about? One look at yer explains that it's not for nothink you've paid us a wisit. What's yer tack, an' who are yer mates?"

Thus suddenly confronted, the explorer, who was trapped and ironed to perfection, and quite at the mercy of the Titan, thought it prudent to play confidence.

"An iron box, containing valuable papers of an old family, and which disappeared many years ago, either before or at the death of the last representative, is supposed to have been taken—it does not follow stolen, for the said owner was a man of eccentric purpose—by an old female servant, who, after the death of her master, quitted the place with the declared resolution of joining her son in America. From careful inquiry, personally conducted, we believe the old woman never reached America; that if she really started she either died or was wrecked; and it is the opinion of myself and partners that the old box is about. There are three of us engaged in the inquiry, and we have been for some considerable time doing the marine stores of London, Liverpool, and New York, and one of these fine days we'll come upon it. We've coin, Mr Bulltack, and if you're disposed to aid us, by keeping a sharp look-out, and, if you will, hunting odd quarters, which I should never find out, why I am at liberty to offer you one hundred pounds for the box, unopened, whenever you shall become possessed of the right one."

All the time of this lengthy explanation, which pleased Bulltack for its evident truth, he had been holding the lantern in the same position, not once removing his sullen stare at the other's face, listening with stolid indifference apparently, but with a half-ferocious scratching of his palm with his long nails, where one hand was hanging with a clenched formidable fist.

Bulltack reflected. The throes of Bulltack's reflection produced a reverberating rumbling that might be inner curses inveighed at the more puny mortal before him, or philosophic communing upon the Bulltackian plan. Any way he shortly afterwards threw these words down like a heap of quoits: "I'll take ye, mister. Guess I'll ferrit it out. Come here in about a month, an' if th' box is brought 'tween 'ere an' Greenwich I'll find the shop! It's certain I 'aven't got it by me now."

"Very well. I'm pleased to make the arrangement with you, and needn't detain you longer. You quite understood what I said about the box not being opened. We shall not pay the money if it is, as we want to make quite sure all the papers are there, which one can't do, Mr Bulltack, when a box is opened. No offence to you intended."

"All right." The ponderous form slowly moved, and the owner led the way up-stairs again. The visitor was not sorry to return to the daylight. With a nod of candour and good understanding, he departed, considerably impressed, in the large way, by what the banks of the Thames furnished in the department of natural history.

When he had gone, Mr Bulltack stood stolid and grim, realising it. By his side was a huge old anchor; over the floor old locks and keys were lying thick and brown as the leaves in autumn woods; over his head were hung rusty implements of the metal in which he dealt. All around was a serried mass of quaint tawny plant and lumber. A slant shaft of sunshine, spear-like and swift, tipped the ware with a line and edging of light that was golden and tantalising. And the mighty buyer of rubbish was not to be tantalised by sunshine nor anything else, and just marched with the

deliberation of giants to a back cavern, from whence, by the ear, he brought out a female Bulltack, as mighty and massive as himself. In the other ear of this interesting person he breathed a hoarse whisper: "I'm going out; look to the shop:" and strode out.

His late visitor meantime was not idle. He had not abandoned the business with the arrangement recently effected; on the contrary, he had penetrated a still more narrow and offensive intricacy of low-built houses, and was on the search for some store of less considerable dimensions, for it was not at all a certainty that any one with an old iron box for sale would take it to the redoubtable Bulltack's, who, moreover, would probably exert a nervous influence the reverse of ingratiating. So the indefatigable explorer looked about for a more likely mart, and after threading a complex labyrinth of noisome lanes, he found outlet to the water-side again. In that same quarter were huddled together a cluster of close-built premises, worthy inside and out of the corresponding region in Constantinople; the chief of these being noticeable on account of a sign bearing the red-lettered publication most of interest to strangers:—

ACKRIFT,

THE SAILOR'S FRIEND.

Good Price for Curiosities.

"That's more like it." And with this remark the member of the London, Liverpool, and New York Marine Store exploring expedition entered Ackrift's well-known and accommodating house of exchange.

Within was to be found an entirely different collection from those previously visited. And while the objects there on view comprised everything known and unknown upon a planet remarkable for singular productions, the accumulation of dirt and disorder was upon a correspondingly flourishing scale. Ackrift's, indeed, might unhesitatingly be pronounced

the premier den of London: such weird relics of disastrous times; such spoliation of the sea's greedy claim; such scum-skimming from the foreshore of the Thames; such bringing home of odd products from distant parts; such ghastly reminders of barbarism and crime; such hideous monstrosities and malformations were surely never huddled together in one small, close, low-pitched London space.

The proprietor had nevertheless made room for a rough bit of counter. Behind it he would stand to higgle and haggle with some poor sailor by the hour together, over some black-haired, brown-skinned scalp or six-legged monkey. A beautiful piece of irony was the scarlet sign without; very admirably was Ackrift the sailor's friend! A tall, thin, dry-looking man, who might have been rolled up of parched palm-leaves, and sent home in the hold of a sun-scorched vessel where yellow jaundice had been rife; keen, weasel-faced, bordered with curls of the cork-screw design, highly garnished with rancid oil, the make of which he possessed the patent for; not rejoicing in the Egyptian fulness of habit characteristic of the preserved humanity known as a mummy, but rejoicing in the Egyptian fulness of nastiness characteristic of the present humanity known as the gipsy—a lank, cadaverous, grim Ishmaelite, bleached and faded, and shrivelled out to increased length that converted him into the spectral sailor's friend we find him.

The explorer upon entering was cuttingly invited to take his hat off or he'd knock down some of the things. Complying with the injunction, he sought to win over Mr Ackrift by remarking upon the fineness of his collection, whereupon the proprietor craftily replied that he supposed they were brought to him because the owners couldn't get enough anywhere else; he gave a good price for things, and it soon got about from one to another,—looking eagerly meantime to see what the customer might bring out from his coat-pocket to invite his liberal advances on.

"I want to be a customer if I can, Mr Ackrift."

"It ain't much account to me whether I buys or sells, so long as business is doing one way or t'other. What are you wanting, mister?"

"Something in the box way. I should say a good iron case will serve my purpose."

"Well, boxes is boxes, and a case is a case. It won't put you out perhaps to say which it is you want?"

"Have you anything by you about the size of a good big cash-box?"

The cadaverous gentleman drew in his thin lips and half closed his eyes, perhaps casting an ascertaining glance around, perhaps taking mental inventory of the stock. Then he slowly answered, "Yes, I think I have the very thing if we can get it open for you."

"Never mind that," answered the other, hurriedly. "I'll see to that if it suits me."

"Afraid it won't; it's in an awful state o' rust and grime."

"Well, let us see; I daresay you don't want much for it?"

"No; you can have it at pretty nearly yer own price, for I didn't give much for it in the first place." He went from the counter, in and out the collection, to the foot of a dark, straggling, old pair of stairs that led by a double route of peril up to the reserve of the curiosities and the habitable rooms of the abode. He called to some person who was making a great noise, all to him or herself, amidst the confusion of lumber: "Bring me down that iron box we couldn't open."

There was creaking of the stairs, a sharp toe of an old boot of some animal-skin, a discoloured red skirt, a brown dress, long fingers, hands, arms hanging straight and jointless; a long skinny form—it seemed as though its full length would never descend; a scraggy neck, a bony head, keen, weasel-faced, bordered with curls of the cork-screw design: the gentle female Ackrift stood before the astonished customer. But she bore bad news that set him inwardly reviling her inoffensive personality.

"I sold it half an hour since, while you were gone to the dock. You said let anybody have it at their price, and Snapper came along and said he'd a customer as could do with it, and he'd give ninepence for it."

"Threepence profit," muttered the proprietor; "all right,

that'll do. So I can't suit ye, mister; but business is, first come, first served, eh?"

"Quite right; well, I'll try further."

"Perhaps old Snapper's customer ain't called on him yet, and he might let yer have it."

Nodding with a friendly manner, sometimes his policy, the customer quitted the shop. He betook himself to the water-side, and with some thoughtfulness watched its motion. That sharp practice of the shrewd Snapper took him by surprise, and it would be worse than useless to go back there with the idea of the old man giving up possession of it. Apart from the tremendous loss, if it chanced to be the box he supposed, this partner, who was an uncommonly cunning fellow, had a positive objection to being outwitted by an old marine-store dealer. He walked into a tavern and asked for a pen and ink, sheet of paper, and envelope. They had not got any, and didn't think he'd get them thereabout. He continued his walk in the Snapper direction, and presently came to a little shop with some bottles of ink in the window, and went in and wrote this:—

"*I've found out all about the box, and think we may make a good thing of it; come and talk it over.—Ackrift.*"

It might or might not serve for a ruse. He sent a boy on with it, telling him to say Ackrift sent him, if asked where he came from. Then he walked on to Snapper's, leisurely, to give Snapper time to get clear off, if happily the letter took the desired effect. As he expected, upon reaching the shop first visited by him, the proprietor's seat was vacant, while his wife came forward upon entrance of the customer. He was prepared with what to say, and said it, with assumed haste: "Snapper wants the box; not a minute to lose. Send it on to Ackrift's, or I can take it to save time." She went and brought it from a cupboard where Snapper had placed it, and she handed it to the person from Ackrift's. He lost no time in making off with it, and placed a large tract of London between himself and marine storage, before breathing at his leisure; finally turning in at a dingy private house in the

Essex Road, Islington, whereon a brass plate bore the name of MR CRICK.

When the person answering to the name upon the door-plate had entered, he locked himself in a dingy back room, in company with a variety of tools, common and uncommon, that would have aroused the speculative interest of those who hold that civilisation is done and undone by such; here he set to work by aid of one or two of them to force his case, obtained after so much industry. Of course, he could not depend upon its being the box of which he was in search—that containing the priceless freightage which imparted knowledge of the huge treasure; but it certainly was singular that a box, difficult to open, and that had evidently been some time under water, should have been knocking about amongst the marine-store dealers; and it was with a very sanguine smile he proceeded with his task, while thinking how neatly he had tricked the astute Mr Snapper, whose sagacity was evidently deserving of a generally lucrative recognition.

The opening of that box took some time, but Mr Crick's ingenuity met with its reward. It was opened. Papers were disclosed, and Mr Crick's good-luck, which was proverbial, seemed again in the ascendant. He lifted the papers; strange spice-like odour was wafted from them—a warmth of fragrance that caused him to sniff contemptuously, as some do upon inhaling the perfume upon the letters of high-born ladies, a subtile delicacy they fail to understand. But presently his look also became ominously contemptuous, for he found how neatly the astute Mr Crick had likewise been tricked by that same Fortune hitherto his ally. Undoubtedly she had put him upon a wrong scent. The writing upon these parchments was in foreign characters which he could not decipher: noble arms were at the head, and the word ZENAÏDE, large and grand-looking. He was so mortified over his disappointment, he just took no notice of the contents at all, but tossed them back into the box, opened the door, and threw the box into the cellar.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BROTHERS TOMKINS.

[illegible] exceedingly comfortable, although far from luxurious, [illegible] of the Brothers Tomkins was situated at a pleasant distance from the town of Ipswich, upon a road that was a highly popular walk amongst the townspeople; many spacious villa-residences, with well-cultivated gardens, lending interest and supplying subject-matter for conversation: the occupants a standing endless theme. Thus it was not unusual for the uninformed to ask, "Who lives there?" upon passing the handsome dwelling with its surrounding of shrubbery and formally laid out flower-beds, and to be told, "There? Oh, the great Tomkins family! Very wealthy gentlemen, much looked up to." They were; especially by those desiring their custom.

The back garden sloped to the bank of the river Orwell, and presented with its rural landscape a fair demesne as seen from the breakfast-parlour window, and, nothing intervening to spoil the view, the Brothers Tomkins might fancy the entire extent their own, while partaking of morning beverages at one precise hour with one precise regularity. The word beverages is necessary, because Mr Adam alone took coffee, for it caused the head of Mr Seth to ache, and reposed heavily upon the stomach of Mr Noah. Mr Seth drank cocoa, which he held to be an exceedingly agreeable beverage; Mr Noah at the same time taking tea, in his opinion the clearest, purest, and altogether most proper drink for a Tomkins. "I dissent from the starch element in cocoa, brother Seth; and black liquids, brother Adam, from coffee to stout, I take to be too deceptive." This did not apply to their china, a strikingly

simple coffee and tea service, in black and white, the preponderance of the black to the white being as three is to four.

There was no presiding housekeeper; the brothers preferred to be quite alone. Mr Adam, as the senior Tomkins, poured out; and carved at dinner. There was no irregularity at the Tomkins's table: the cups were ready for refilling at one exact moment; the knife and fork were laid down by each to the tick of the clock. All rose at the same time, walked each to his accustomed seat and read the morning papers. There was no waste in the Tomkins household: the newspapers containing articles of interest were filed by their respective owners; the residue were straightened, folded, and placed on the pile of its respective owner, and periodically sold. The file of Mr Adam, the pile of Mr Seth, and the file and pile of Mr Noah, all kept to a regular height that, like the water at London Bridge, varied according to the tide.

The domestics at the Brothers Tomkins's had been selected with great care from special samples furnished by the advertising columns of very old-established and highly decorous journals—such journals, indeed, as would most admirably supply the exemplary menials necessary to attend upon a Tomkins. Thus two demure bodies, with extraordinary powers of repressing all outward and visible signs of the vanity and humanity peculiar to domestics, had been in their service many years, during all which time they had never been known to laugh, break anything, talk to the butcher-boy, ask for more sugar, or wish to go out! They were a neat, black and white, truth-telling, plain-featured, small-eating pair. The united discrimination of the three Brothers Tomkins had been brought to bear upon the important office of their selection; and it was not very likely that united discrimination would have misled them. They both came from Oxford; the father of one was a sexton, the father of the other made coffins. They were respectably connected, an uncle of one being a milkman, of repute as milkmen go; of the other, an apothecary with a local *prestige* for the efficacy of his black draughts. They suited the eminently genteel and particular Brothers Tomkins as though they had been designed expressly.

Every town of any propriety possesses its great moral family, the embodiment of the virtues, the representative excellence held up for example. It is a beautiful sight to see this chastened band proceed to their church on Sunday morning; it was a beautiful sight to see the Brothers Tomkins thus proceeding, although, to be sure, it brought one's own inequality home to one and filled one's heart with an ideal scarcely to be attained by the naturally sinning and constitutionally vicious. One might no more hope to approach the perfection of these exalted men than one might expect to copy the performance of that sublime little spring that seemed to the awe-struck to indicate the unearthliness of their nature and how their very heels lifted them heavenwards. Arm-and-arm, church services in hand, black hats on Sunday, also with a black band round (it was never quite known whom for, but attributed by the reverent to the successive saints and martyrs according to the day), black suits on Sunday, black kid gloves on Sunday—the entire presentment was one of rebuke; and those who sit at odd corners of windows over closed shops, when they saw the Brothers upon the opposite side, invariably moved a little way back, so as to be out of sight; while many a pang struck to the heart of the stay-at-home ones fatigued by late trading on the night before. Such men do good in a town, keeping pure the higher atmosphere, and seeming to serve as living illustrations of the Gospels and commentaries on the Epistles. They were read in that light—Mr Seth sandwiched between Epistle and Gospel, appearing to the reverent aforenamed like the Collect for the day.

The Brothers Tomkins entered church and entered the Tomkins's family pew at the same punctual time every Sabbath-day, and the irreverent set their watches by them. They knelt and arose mechanically, and in a business-like manner, as conveying, "We would not trifle with the time of men, nor will we with that of Providence." If Mr Adam indulged a slant glimpse at some fair Eve, in line with him, Mr Seth with his elbow touched his rib accidentally yet reprovingly. If Mr Noah opened the windows of his heart to some dove, if but for a moment, the watery eyes of Mr Seth, combined with

the gust of a sorrowful sigh, shut up the window instantly. It was simply impossible for Mr Seth himself to transgress from his central position. He therefore kindly looked out for the integrity of the Tomkins family by keeping keen watch upon the protectors of himself. A beautifully bonded brotherhood was this, more wolf than lamb, perhaps; but as a knit, compact relationship, without a peer.

The pew of the Brothers Tomkins was near to that of Cobham Masheter, Esq., the largest landowner thereabout, so that when the curate with the drawl they so much disapproved of, was reading, they had something to look at and something to think about; and it may be remarked aside, that any allusion to the promised land somehow sent the eyes of the Brothers over in the direction of that noble white-haired owner of acres, who was even as another Joshua. Also within immediate view of the Brothers were the two pews occupied by the St Luke Lillingstons; and under the gallery, the two pews of Mr John Clark, the well-to-do farmer, whose stalwart sons, marching in a file, recalled pleasant reminiscences (to those who had lived in garrison towns) of the attendance at church of the military. Just in front of the Brothers Tomkins was the luxuriously-cushioned pew of one of the old aristocratic families of that neighbourhood—very genial people, extending liberal patronage to everything, from a bazaar for a charity to a benefit at the theatre. Their inclinations leaned for preference to anything in the way of the latter, but this did not check their generous expression of sympathy with every good cause.

The Brothers Tomkins invariably arrived ten minutes after the opening of the doors, not to watch the people come in, nor because they were sensitive and did not like walking up the church late: it was to set an example; it was strict adherence to their business principles, for the Brothers were not by any means samples of those who abandon their principles when they retire from their business.

If the reader will accompany the Brothers Tomkins to church—and it will be conceded he might be in less profitable company—we shall take him there upon an especially

interesting occasion; none other, indeed, than that of sermons preached by Dr Chancel, Bishop of Beechester.

The congregation was seated in better time than ordinary upon those special visits of the bishop; not that they gained any particular edification from that worthy ecclesiastic's discourse, for Dr Chancel was rather more prosy than are divines of his degree in the general way; but the event stirred the sluggishness and torpor, and thus did good. It made another in the processional walk from the vestry. There was something of ceremony about it, and the public liking for ceremony or the approach to it, is of very old date. Thus, when we arrive with the devout gentlemen wearing black bands for some other bishop, who had a less easy time of it than this of Beechester, the church is two-parts full. The accomplished Jubal in the organ-gallery is filling the old grey confines of the building with sacred melody. The choir are in their places, and fidget the red curtains in front of them with the irritating movement natural to the species. The aislesmen, sidesmen, and vergers, wear the approved look of importance when one of the twenty-four lords spiritual of the House of Peers diffuses an atmosphere of solemn respect, which the Lord of all peers and bishops but too often fails to receive. And the sunlight of the sunniest of the last days of August streams through the rich stained windows, imparting such pleasing hues to the gilded pipes of the organ, the very little children, knowing nothing of bishops, keep their eyes thereon thinking something of heaven with dim ideal conceptions of the beautiful instruments there, and those who play upon them—of small account evidently to those who think a bishop in the hand is worth two seraphs in the clouds; for the very little ones are roughly pushed and reproved for staring about. Thus do we destroy the finer subtilty in infancy, which may, for all we know, or often care, be more gratefully acceptable than are the astonishingly clever faculties, the nurture of universities.

There is some noise at the bottom of the church, firm treading of firm feet. This must be the entrance of the bishop and clergy. The Brothers Tomkins do not look round; they never look round, remembering Lot's wife. There is a sneak-

ing little touch of the greediest side of Lot's character in the nature of the Brothers, which they are fully aware of and are very grieved at, and show their antipathy to by thinking austerely of his wife. No; it is the simple advance-guard of the Saxons: seven sons of the soil come to the church to which they pay tithe—come with an open candour—boy-like, before boys become deceptive; man-like, while yet the manhood is a glory. The stained window, or rather the sunbeams through it, lends blue and crimson tipping to the sharp noses of the Brothers Tomkins, who look frostily over the church colours and ahead to where the men who pay tithe are installing themselves in their pews; but anon the look changes by a swift unconsciousness, which they would gladly have prevented had they been prepared for it, and which they nip the instant it dares to show itself, when Mr Clark walks up the side-aisle with his pretty and youthful niece. Mr Noah, who is nearest that side, and consequently, warm first, begins to find the places; but opening the book at the Marriage Service, he sternly crosses a leg, plants his elbow on his closed hand firm on the top of the Church Services, sets his chin rigidly on thumb and doubled forefinger, and stares hard and unflinchingly virtuous at the vestry-door, through which bishops and other unworldly, albeit wealthy, men pass to the glory of the celibate.

Mr Adam, meantime, has been similarly troubled, for this cause: Miss Ada Sylvester, governess at the St Luke Lillingstons', has entered with the usual string of minor St Luke Lillingstons; and Mr Adam, from visiting the head of that house, had some shadowy, decorous acquaintance with the young lady, who is well-favoured, exceedingly genteel, and possessed of a lady-like demeanour that is very becoming. The beloved brothers of Mr Adam—not to injure that gentleman — were similarly acquainted and in the same manner. Not to speak now of his brothers, it may be revealed in great confidence that Mr Adam secretly admired Miss Sylvester, and never met her out walking with the minor St Luke Lillingstons but the habitual little spring lifted him with an almost hymeneal celerity inexpressibly shocking to a gentle-

man of his principles. Thus when Miss Sylvester had entered, had sorted her mixed sweets and arranged them in packets, in her pew and the pew in front, leaving the place against the door for mamma, who was nervously constituted, and invariably late, and was accustomed to glide in and sink as guiltily as though she had stolen the chalice, and had got it in the little embroidered bag which she always brought to church with her, containing one scarlet-and-black fan, one bottle of aromatic vinegar, one acidulated lozenge, one biscuit, one pincushion, one packet of hair-pins (for this lady, amongst other ailments, suffered from the fearful feeling of always coming to pieces); one French liqueur lozenge, and one card bearing her name and address, in case anything happened to her on the way to church. When Miss Sylvester had thus performed her duties, and had spread out her quiet stuff dress, settling herself devotionally comfortable, chancing to look that way, her bright and pleasing eyes met those of the rich head of the House of Tomkins. It was accidental, and there was no harm upon the young lady's side. She was not of the designing order, and entertained but slight regard for wealth beyond a sufficiency for the support of herself and young sister, dependent upon her. But, somehow, her innocent glances did sink most strangely into the heart of Mr Adam. He could not account for it, and, certainly, was not going to risk his portion of the Tomkins wealth; and he now sat very upright, with the uprightness which is a protest, looking hard, very hard, with the hardness of ascetics, at the tables of stone either side the communion table—chiefly upon the right-hand-side one, that containing the last of the commandments.

Assuredly if this generation be lacking in probity and virtue, as some people unkindly assert, the presence among us of the Brothers Tomkins should restore the balance of moral equity. Stay! Mr Seth is restive. What fiend is tempting Mr Seth, who is not thinking of the hymn-book he is placing a ribbon-marker straight in? The truth is, Mr Seth has the ill-fortune to be troubled more exquisitely than either of his brothers, and in his agitation and confusion feels behind him for his pocket-handkerchief, and brushes his strict thin lips with it—

possibly, and as he hopes will be thought, preparatory to joining in the praise. It is noted by the outsiders instantly: Brother Seth has never been thus known to surrender to emotion, and with electric tingling they feel the centre-pole, supporting the canopy of their integrity, is toppling, and a half-apprehensive, half-greedy flash of significance is interchanged. It would be sad, but it would add grandly to the revenue, if Brother Seth yielded to temptation. The cause of it sat in the pew of the Cobham Masheters, where that lovely girl who had attracted so much observation, and who was understood to be a Miss Lute, of Highgate, near London, recalled pleasant mornings on the promenade at Tunbridge Wells: revived sensations that had before this caused uneasiness. Miss Lute, her mamma, Cobham Masheter, and an elderly handsome man, Lord Gascoyne.

Fortunately for Mr Seth, who was beginning to feel how seriously the Brothers Tomkins were between fires—and he had closely observed, and with sympathy, the discomfort of his kin—the occupants of the adjoining pew came in, and interposed a very graceful and elegant partition.

Inasmuch as more piety is prevalent upon days sacred to bishops, the church was very full. The pew-opener, whispering, asked Miss Sylvester in passing if Mrs Lillingston would be there, and was amiably replied to in the affirmative. Afterwards she came across to the alarmed and outraged Mr Adam, and whispering, asked, "Do you mind two ladies sitting in your pew this morning, sir? we are pushed for room." "But *we* don't wish to be," replied Mr Adam, anything but amiably; "show them up into the gallery." The woman did as directed; for the Great Tomkins Family was not to be disobeyed by creatures whom they could make or undo by the streetfull. "It is impossible to feel reverent; very improper;" remarked Mr Adam, aggrieved, to the brother next him; and in as low a tone, Mr Noah, on the other side, asked of Mr Seth, "What does Brother Adam say?" Mr Seth tickled the scant iron-grey whisker with his long nose, and explained to Brother Noah. The aristocratic lady in front looked with a pretty attitude over her shoulder — it was so unusual for the three precise

gentlemen to interchange a word in church—and the one in slant view shrank. She is very fashionably attired: is a very beautiful woman, with the happiest and most sparkling eyes imaginable. Such attractions too nearly approach the carnal to please the spiritually-minded Brothers Tomkins, or to admit of their sitting at their ease under play of those slant side-glances, which, although good-humouredly critical, read with a penetration which seldom errs.

It wants five minutes yet to the time of commencing the service. It is not reverent, but let us take a five minutes' glimpse of this congregation. Gentry, agriculturists, retired traders, and traders not retired nor retiring, form the bulk of the people, and a homely, genuine, respectable-looking bulk it is. And surely one feels that a villa on that Prosperity Road where the Brothers Tomkins reside would be by no means objectionable on the score of Ipswich neighbourship!

Yonder old gentleman with the frill is one of the magnates—a banker of long standing: of spotless reputation. The Brothers Tomkins worship at his shrine steadfastly. The other old gentleman close by, who wears no frill, and whose head is very bowed, sunk a quarter of a million in a silver-mine. The capital turned to quicksilver, the capitalist's locks turned to whiteness; and now the once erect head is bowed, the once confident look of tact and discernment is averted. An awful example, the Brothers Tomkins think, of misdirected speculation; and they give him a wide berth, lest they catch the contagion of ill-fortune. The thin gentleman in the blue-worked waistcoat, who is of the severely fierce cast, looks additionally severe to-day, not altogether, but still indirectly, on the account of this visit of their bishop. Drawing up the blind at home with added vigour to his wonted energy he broke the cord, and it came down, like a chamber-guillotine, with deadly effect upon the neck of a stoppered heirloom, a cut-glass perfume-bottle, presented to his distinguished literary ancestor by Queen Anne—a fact largely dwelt upon at guest-times when the precious but brittle relic is shifted to the guest-chamber. The Bishop of Beechester gets the credit for this

breakage, and the thin man's soul is full of wrath. We think he might have left that outside; yes, but perhaps we haven't cut-glass Queen Anne perfume-bottles, or at all events not thus decapitated. These are the things that try men and make them irritable, and seem almost more than they can bear, until a look from the eyes of some meek, unmurmuring, unceasingly suffering woman, suggests more grievous trial to some of us.

The corner pew belongs to a firm of civil engineers. The firm walks in very softly, and takes its seat as though to test capacity. They move with caution, as though for ever on the border of danger, looking up with half-stealthy glances, as accustomed to calculating the space of everything, and measuring the girth of all comprised within constructive limits. They are not in the approved Sunday gear; but then the negligence we may entertain distaste for is the admirable insignia of the *savant*. They write clever papers which nobody understands, and are much looked up to in consequence. The walls of their residence are made secure by girders, they having worked out before the landlord's own eyes the exact time to an hour when these walls are bound to sever their connection with the interior. They are not the only negligent-dressing gentlemen to be seen. The editions of buckskin, doeskin, and moleskin here present, would shock London. Some of these are quiet deep ones, with a mysterious training knowledge, and intimacy, under the rose, with half the stables in the kingdom.

And there are grave gentlemanly men, of county standing. Although not titled they wear nobility like an emblem of their high and ancient pedigree. One of them was once member for the borough, but failing health—not lessened confidence—led to his retirement. The lady is his wife, and worthy all the honour with which her husband's name is regarded. Some people are here who have a considerable quantity of texts and proverbs about, on everything from the bread-trencher to the toilet-ware, which is eloquent with maxim, encircled by quiet-coloured botany: they have designs illuminated in much chaste colour, with much choice sentiment, until their walls, like those of the Temple of Con-

fucius, are a glow of framed treasures, very gems of the ethics.

There is a Watteau study, who looks as though she would crack if she fell; she gazes forward with an unconscious and innocent air; she only needs the shepherd's crook and garland to render her piquant as the most daintily-painted piece of Dresden that ever brightened the eyes of a collector. Close by her is a bushy-faced being, red on the cheek, fierce in the eye, with a twitch of the shoulder as though adjusting the epaulet: it is a commissioned officer, who takes what he calls a field view of society, admires his own limbs, and is altogether a really important person. The aristocratic-looking girl in the pew behind attracts notice, but the extreme pallor of the classically-moulded cheek causes one to think of late hours, balls, opera, suppers, and all the glittering ghastliness of the *boulevard de consumption*. She comes from London, and it is easy to see is the daughter of the plain farmer-like country gentleman beside her: one of the county families, their carriage is put up at the hotel during divine service.

At last the vestry-door is opened, the choristers enter,—boys in snowy linen, boys with fair faces, with sweet voices, one with song which thrills,—and the men, then the clergy of the church, with the bishop; and it is remarked by the faithful that the bishop is looking uncommonly well, not in the least like being worn down by abstinence or toil.

With grave dignity the bishop takes his place; and while the clergy kneel there is profound silence, broken by terrific noise midway of the centre aisle, which causes Dr Chancel to cut his meditation shorter than he should have done; for, not being used to the place, and aware of its age, recollecting all at once he had upon a former occasion received a circular connected with its restoration, which, up to this time he had forgotten, or would not be here to-day—entertaining extremely nervous prejudice to officiating in edifices in need of restoration, lest they tumble about his ears and deprive the State Church of his orthodox self,—Dr Chancel made short work of it by rising abruptly and looking down the church to discover what was amiss. He

discovered this: in the aisle there stood a wooden pedestal and wide-winged eagle whereon the Bible was wont to rest while the curate addressed the children at the four o'clock service for the young. This lecturn had been presented to the church by the Brothers Tomkins, who were much too mean to give one of brass, to say nothing of their abstaining from so doing upon principle, since they held that so much brass in the church was reprehensible to a degree. So they gave this clumsy old thing, and into it had walked the abstracted Mrs St Luke Lillingston, knocking it over flat, and making things worse by trying to pick it up again; but though she embraced the vicious-looking bird of prey frantically, the weight of it was too much for her and she dropped it, standing with quaking hesitation as to what to do next. The acute nervousness of the lady made it worse, and painful embarrassment reigned in the pews upon either side, and no one made the first step to her relief. It was not the eagle they were in doubt about, they would hoist that between them, it was the eccentric mistress of Brunswick House, whose actions were uncertain, and not regulated by feeling for other people, that produced the panic. No one else would have thought of walking into the eagle, and she would not have done so had not the bishop been there. Thus thought the mortified Brothers Tomkins, but could not see the murderous onslaught without interfering; and while the senior curate read loudly, "*Dearly beloved brethren*," they with the unanimous spring gave token of immediate action; and when the curate continued, "*the Scripture moveth us*," they angularly left their pews, and with rapid noiseless skill restored the reading-stand to its proper position. The cause of the unseemly disturbance meanwhile mincingly gained her seat, where Ada Sylvester, burning hot as the vicar himself, knew not which way to look. She felt that the unprecedented accident must have caused a very unfavourable impression, and half wished Mrs Lillingston would follow her husband's example and stay at home. Her absence of mind was so confirmed, it made it really hazardous her venturing unattended to church, but the children were so troublesome she was glad

to send them on ahead with their governess. Mr St Luke Lillingston did not go to church, and greatly appreciated the quiet while the others were there. His highly devotional course of reading for the Sunday morning invariably began with the sporting papers, glided on to the Reviews, and finished up with 'The Whole Duty of Man,' by when the boisterous troop were about him again, and there was no more reading of anything.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BEAVERS TAKE TO THE WATER.

THE ready presence of mind and discreet service of the Brothers Tomkins were much commended, and it was held to be symbolic of their support of the public ordinances of religion. It was now hoped the service would proceed without any other distressing interruption; but some little commotion was going on by the door, in consequence of two gentlemen courteously refusing to receive the remonstrative assurance that the centre aisle was quite full. "I am only a little one, you know," said the elder of the two, affably, "and my son here will squeeze in somehow." Great indignation was aroused when the old gentleman coolly walked up and opened the pew-door of the Brothers Tomkins, who, without a scene, could not have resented it, and there put into force their squeezing process by making room for themselves without further ceremony.

"Sorry to discommode you," said the old gentleman in an audible whisper to Mr Adam; "but my Phineas has never seen a Bishop, and we chose the opportunity. Can you tell us which is the Bishop?" Much scandalised, Mr Adam would not reply, but lowered his head to the ledge with a much-afflicted cast of feature. It did not hurt the feelings of the elderly intruder, whose attention, moreover, had been caught by something else, namely, the three bright-banded hats of the revered Brothers. He was perfectly at home over this, and, taking one off its peg, he eyed it with connoisseurish delicacy. "This is a capital hat, you know, but you've put the band on the wrong way. There's tops and bottoms to bands, and you've got it on wrong way up'ards!"

Mr Adam thought he knew as much about bands as most people—it was one of their strong points; the furnishing and fitting up of that institution known as The Brothers—and to be thus audibly rebuked by the profane intruder, an ill-bred interloper and disturber of the peace, so upset the Head of the House of Tomkins, that he let fall a little crisp, curt, curse. It fell into the hat and was not, fortunately, heard beyond the pew; but it shows how the godly may be provoked to righteous ire when aggression oversteps the boundary of human endurance. The brothers of Mr Adam looked overwhelmed by surprised concern. Mr Seth, with hands clasped, book open on the ledge before him, eyes devoutly upward, was very troubled; as was also Mr Beaver, who had no book; this he adjusted by leaning across Mr Adam and taking Mr Seth's while asking Mr Adam the day of the month for the Psalms. Really, the impudence of these people exceeded tolerance! And the Brothers groaned inwardly lest the worthy folk around supposed them connections of theirs. They had walked in with such cool familiarity that the assumption was almost warranted, and the Brothers' poignant anguish in consequence, imparted a most unprepossessing aspect to their generally benign countenances. Mr Beaver was so beautifully vulgar by nature, no sort of opposition ever affronted him. He literally did not feel it, and was much too genial-minded, or pretended to be, to notice it. Mr Adam was just cooling when the annoying old fellow must needs loudly whisper, "My boy Phineas will trouble you for a hassock, if you please!" There were but three, and upon each of these the respective pair of feet of each member of the Family was rested. Mr Adam disdainfully declined to take any notice whatever of the liberty, whereupon the old gentleman looked down and under the seat, and recognising the limit of the provision, he gave the aristocrat in front a vigorous knock on the back, which caused that elegant gentleman to turn round as though shot; really he believed the eccentric Mrs St Luke Lillingston had aimed a Prayer-book at him!

"You haven't got a hassock to spare, have you?" asked the disagreeable person. "My boy Phineas must have his feet

up, or else he's sea-sick." When the Brothers Tomkins heard this, they cast a look of unutterable horror at the bilious-complexioned, freckled, speckled, red-haired Phineas, and Mr Adam kicked his hassock towards the old man with the vehemence of exploding indignation.

"I say, you know, remember I've got corns; one of the reasons why I left business; couldn't stand it."

Having left business himself, Mr Adam very much disliked to hear any one who had also left business recur to it in public. The aristocratic face of the lady in front was gradually returning to its more natural tinting, for it had been suffused with blushes, the confusion of herself and her husband being extreme.

From the unpleasantness of their conduct these Beavers were decidedly out of place in this church, and so the congregation appeared to think. Why, the men did not even manifest the decent respect witnessed in small places, and here was a great, old parish church, hallowed by the devotion of generations of worshippers, and with a venerable dignitary of the Church standing by the altar, and these men were not impressed with a sense of any of it! The Bishop himself, while this had been proceeding in the body of the sacred edifice, was recovering his confidence at its head; and when, in the course of reading the Litany, the vicar solemnly came to the passage, "*That it may please Thee to illuminate all bishops,*" the beaming peace and goodwill upon the face of him of Beechester, seemed to bear illustrative testimony thereto.

The Bishop's text on this memorable occasion was taken from two passages found in the forty-ninth Psalm, verse ten, and the thirteenth chapter of Proverbs, verse twenty-two, the words being these: "*Wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others.*" "*The wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just.*" And each Brother Tomkins, holding fast to his own justness, and looking askant upon his two Brothers, honestly believed to be sinners, thought the text singularly appropriate. Mr Adam took quiet revenge on the troublesome interloper when the fate of the brutish person was decided, by looking him hard in the face. The in-

sensible Beaver was entirely oblivious to it, apparently. Be this the case or no — and the unsuspected depth of these Beavers was not to be sounded during any casual acquaintance —when the collection was being made he gave change in full. It was the custom with the Brothers, each to drop a fourpenny-piece into the plate when handed to them, and passed from one to another, but to drop it in such a manner the ring of it conveyed a far more liberal opinion. Upon this occasion, Mr Beaver's sharp eyes, all about him as usual, saw through their benevolence, and in a tone of voice considerably above a whisper, he approvingly remarked to Mr Adam, "You're like me when I was in business; I gave a fourpenny regularly."

The impressive discourse which the Bishop of Beechester might have delivered, but did not, from the words selected for meditation, nevertheless stirred the people, anxious for credit as a congregation, and regardful of the honour of the pastorate, to liberal offerings, and a large sum was collected; small thanks to his lordship, who, beyond lending the dignity of his presence, contributed slightly towards awaking the enthusiasm and ardour of the congregation.

When the services had come to an end, and the choristers and clergy had processionally quitted their stalls for the vestry, the people streamed forth; but instead of proceeding with the stream, the Beavers swam against the tide, struggling through anyhow, close in the wake of each other, towards the head of the church. They were not to be resisted nor impeded; they elbowed and clutched and floundered their way, breasting the current and jostling off all opposition, or, wedge-like, cornerways, angularly, and spitefully, twisting themselves in and out until reaching the end of the aisle, where, the course being clear, they made for the vestry, knocked at the door, and without waiting to be asked, walked in, greatly to the astonishment of the gentlemen there disrobing.

"My Phineas would like to shake hands with the Bishop. Which is the Bishop?"

No description can convey a sufficient idea of the scandalised vexation of the conservative divines at this rude intrusion and peremptory demand. The Bishop screened his high

priestly person behind the vicar, for these might be two tormented of devils, much feared in the eastern counties, and the Bishop of Beechester had no notion how to proceed in such a case. It was very hard, after the fatigue preaching in a good cause, to be thus persecuted, and the energy of the foremost being did not appear to abate. Red in the face with recent exertion, his white hair bristling with ecclesiastic hero-worship, his keen eyes searching amongst those present for the great person with whom his boy Phineas desired the honour of shaking hands, this was not a person to be trifled with, and the vicar stepped forward and said, "Dr Chancel will perhaps see you later on, sir; at present it is out of the question."

To the amazement of every one, instead of replying, the fussy individual darted to the wall and grappled with the Bishop's hat, which had been there hung. It was a hat of ample, nay, of wonderful circumference, and its construction filled the retired manufacturer with awe. "Phineas, this is the Bishop's hat! Fifty-one years in business and never had one of these in my hand before; but it's going here at the edges. God bless him, he'll soon want a new one!"

One of the churchwardens interposed, and requested the gentlemen would withdraw, as the vestry was strictly private to any but those taking part in the services, and the officers of the church.

Whereupon the old gentleman politely withdrew, and went waddling down the church with his slim, raw-looking Phineas, and on to the hotel where they were stopping.

"One of your parishioners?" asked Dr Chancel, with a strong accent of annoyance.

"Good gracious, no!—Never saw the people before." And much flustered, the vicar grasped at his bands, as though strangling.

With charity, spiced with condescension, the Bishop left the unpleasant subject, and shortly afterwards proceeded arm in arm with the vicar to the parsonage, where he would take luncheon.

Less amicable was the understanding between the Brothers Tomkins; Mr Seth and Mr Noah strongly censured Mr

Adam's yielding to the intruders in the first instance. This produced a little difference of opinion over the boiled mutton and caper-sauce at half-past one punctual. Then they lapsed into morose and sullen silence, which had deeper meaning than mere momentary misunderstanding, and, while each Brother Tomkins picked a similar bone of the best end of the neck, strangely dark looks passed, although never a word was spoken until all ceased picking at the same moment, when all spoke together, the burden whereof was this, "I don't like it at all."

Was it the scarcity of capers in the sauce, the stringiness of the turnips, the wateriness of the broth, or the strong flavour to the mutton? Neither; but, when the repast was finished, and grace said, and the cloth removed, each retained his seat, instead of, as usual, the three rising as by one movement. Then the solution appeared. An eminently suggestive conference!

"There was a purpose in that intrusion, Brother Noah!"

"The same idea has occurred to me."

"What do you say, Brother?" to Mr Adam; and Mr Seth waited anxiously for a reply.

"It struck me so some time since."

"They'd have scarcely hit upon us so deliberately without some motive; and I believe we're being *studied*."

"Much good it may do 'em." But there was a solicitude in the low earnest tone that struck a responsive chord, and Mr Adam asked, "You believe they scent that we are acquainted with the site of the Treasure of Boadicea?"

"If you prefer to put it thus plainly, I do, Brother Adam."

"Then, Brother Seth, we must destroy the clue we have buried in the iron box in our garden. I always thought there was a risk in having it there; we had better dig it up and destroy the contents. We can remember the directions—these adventurers have a suspicion about it, and we must remove the clue."

"Exactly! If anybody touches the Treasure it must be ourselves—we have kept the secret of its hiding-place for many years. But as it is, we are mutually agreed our income is sufficient for an unostentatious mode of living, and we do

not desire to display any pomp in our independency; rather to set an example of economy to our less fortunate neighbours who have not by thrift and untiring application to business realised a sufficiency for their support in advanced age. Of course, what the survivor amongst ourselves might elect as the best method of dealing with so large an acquirement of wealth as our own united funds, and, if so pleased, this huge mass of treasure added to it——"

"Provided 'tisn't gone when that time comes," interrupted Mr Noah, with an avaricious look at his brothers, as much as to say they might oblige him by stepping off the stage.

"Just so. I was going to add, what the survivor amongst ourselves might do in such a responsible position, is more than any of us can tell. But we are, I believe, stanch and faithful to one another, and resolute in resisting any trespass." They took hold of each other's hands over the table with a simultaneous grip, and they looked as though they were resolute in the longing to eat each other.

"It is just possible," said Mr Seth, reassuringly, "that we are mistaken about these people."

"They're a dangerous pair—I know by the look of 'em," grumbled Brother Noah, and their senior was just saying he would like to see them dragged through the horse-pond, when—a noise in the passage, and—

"It's not a bit o' good your telling me that. My son Phineas wants to shake hands with Messrs Tomkins all round, and he'll do it!" and the door was dashed open in a jolly fashion, while Mr Beaver, beaming with cheerfulness and broadly pleasant geniality, stood in the doorway. The Brothers Tomkins arose together with the little spring at its full.

"There they are!" cried Mr Beaver, jovially; "every one on 'em. Long life to you, sirs! And God's blessing on your hospitality." He walked up, followed by the young man who was troubled with sea-sickness. "Now, Phineas, the Mister Tomkinses. Gentlemen, my son Phineas would like to shake hands!"

The Brothers resented this Sunday afternoon invasion as a

point of etiquette, as a personal prejudice, and on the policy of defence; and Mr Adam, therefore, with curt politeness, informed the Beaver and his irrepressible satellite, that their intrusion was unprecedented, and in the highest degree objectionable; adding, "The town respects our Sabbath privacy. It is known that we make it a rule to see no one, upon the day of rest, when our time between the intervals of divine worship is occupied in meditation and——"

"Worshipping yourselves," concluded Mr Beaver, with his most mischievously genial manner, drawing a chair up to the table and sitting down, inviting his boy to do the same. "Sit down, Phineas. The Mister Tomkinses wish us to feel quite at home."

The mechanical spring at the heel lifted the indignant Brothers twice. They interchanged looks of solemn wrath, then each stuck out his semi-clerical-cut vest, and trifled with the black chain thereon reposing. The whole thing was of so unusual a nature, it disconcerted even that grave serene self-possession, which was the cocoon of the Great Tomkins individuality. Mr Adam spoke again, and with the faintest possible approach to ire: "I wish to goodness the police were nearer! we have too great respect for this holy day to attempt to eject you ourselves."

"The police are admirable; but, as you say, when prying about houses and gardens are a positive objection."

The Brothers became ghastly, but the red face of their singular visitor was beaming with smiles and beneficence. Nobody on earth could put Mr Beaver out if he had a mind not. With the utmost suavity he explained the object of their visit. "You must know that my boy Phineas has two partialities—one for virtues and t'other for rose-trees: your renown for the former is as great as your reputation for the latter. I heard of the hybrid perpetuals a good many miles away; now we've come to make your acquaintance. I've been very gay in my time, and am thankful to sit, before it is too late, in the presence of the virtues. My Phineas is a moral lad—more after your own heart—and he's come a long way to smell your roses! Phineas, show your father to the

garden, sir! We've excellent scent, and will tell you the very mould they've grown in from the odour of the flower." While saying this the speaker rose briskly, kicked back his chair, and followed his son into the passage. The three gentlemen, meantime, were too astounded by his impudence to think of the underlying vein of banter and possibly menace, or to raise the objection each was fuming to utter. Hanging upon the hat-stand in the passage were the every-day hats of the Brothers, and the retired manufacturer took one down and critically inspected it. "This *looks* all right you know, but it's a cheap affair, and all outside." Mr Seth had one foot in the passage, but withdrew it, retreating backward into the dining-room, where the Brothers stood in line on the hearth-rug in grave and magisterial deliberation. Eventually they heard the intruder walk to the end of the passage, where he opened the kitchen-door, noted the demure pair of domestics seated at the table reading the Church Catechism, and asked them if his son had gone through that way. "No! Then I will, and we shall meet round the corner." It was said blithely, and the Brothers shuddered, while the spring, which manifested latent horror of carnal levity, lifted them in line; and then Mr Adam, followed by Mr Seth and Mr Noah, made for the garden, also by way of the kitchen. Conceive their shocked surprise upon discovering the beaming-faced intruder sitting on the dresser, with the Catechism in his hand, from which he might or might not have been asking questions. "I say," he said to the sombre trio in the doorway, "these girls ought to be confirmed, you know; their pious frame of mind and responsibility, both demand it." So saying, Mr Beaver kicked about actively with his short legs, but did not attempt to descend. Really the profanity of this person was unlike anything ever witnessed. Mr Seth could control himself no longer. "We beg to assure you, sir, our maids *were* confirmed when received into our service. We are very particular, and the irreverence you are displaying hurts our feelings acutely."

"Didn't know you'd got any," said the aggravating old gentleman, jumping lightly off his perch, and looking about

for the way out. The elder of the maids opened the door for him. She had a colourless face, and the skin seemed drawn too tightly over the cheek-bones; she had a glacial look to her eyes of an unpleasant flinty hue; she had pepper-and-salt-coloured hair and eyebrows. She was altogether one of the most unimpressionable females Phineas Beaver had ever encountered. He stepped lightly and quickly past her, and round to the garden, where Phineas junior was seen bending over and smelling the roses. "There's my boy, you see," cried Beaver to those in the rear, waving his hand with balmy paternal satisfaction, "admiring your autumnals, and absorbing a stock of attar to last him the winter." He walked over quickly to his son, and while patting the proud and graceful foremost blossom, said in a low tone, "You see there is a fine opening by the water. You've gone over the ground?" "Yes," replied the other in as low a tone. "I hardly know what to think of it." The Brothers were close. Phineas junior clipped the choicest bud and stuck it in his button-hole. "It wouldn't have hurt you to ask before you did that, sir!" exclaimed Mr Noah with vehemence. It was his own particular tree, and he experienced disgust.

The Brothers each had their particular trees, and were especially chary as to parting with the bloom. Mr Beaver politely admitted it would have looked better to ask, and added, by way of apology, "Phineas was overcome by being so close to it, after coming all this way on purpose." His glittering round little eyes took in the three gentlemen standing on the lawn and looking very straight. Not one of them moved a muscle. He walked towards the house, upon the wall of which grew a magnificent Noisette climber with a profusion of rich golden blossoms; many of its yellow leaves were strewn upon the narrow strip of bed; they had fallen since the morning. The gardener was in weekly Saturday attendance to remove the flotsam and jetsam of the fragrant sea. Mr Beaver was subject to occasional fits of sentiment. He spread his hands out as though warming them over the strewn gold. "What does it remind us of?" he asked, in soft, insinuative tones.

"The yellow fever, I should say," observed the unromantic Phineas, who was close by, as usual.

The Brothers were standing with mute discontent, in line, on the edge of the grass. That turf was springy, perhaps; it is certain they were lifted simultaneously.

"Phineas, lad," said Mr Beaver with a displeased manner, facing round, "you have interpolated a sickly and infectious comparison in an observation of beauty which your father was about to give utterance to, but it shall not spoil the remark, sir, as it was originally intended to be uttered. I was about to say, of what does this prodigality of wealth remind us if not of the golden maxim that riches take to themselves wings?" Mr Beaver seldom soared to this altisonant height; from it he took a bird's-eye view of its effect. If there was a maxim they hated worse than the rest it was this; the amity, benevolence, and piety, of the Brothers were at variance with it, and for this ill-bred person to plausibly leave it behind as the souvenir of their insulting intrusion, seemed the most grievous stroke these much-afflicted Christian gentlemen had yet endured. Their suffering was of short duration. Mr Beaver drew off his annoying *attaché*, and, thanking the Brothers for their hospitality, retired arm in arm. And since one was short and broad, and the other tall and thin, the figure they cut marching down the half-circle of carriage-drive to the gate would have seemed ludicrous, but for the severe annoyance felt by the Brothers, which precluded any lighter emotion.

Each of the Brothers walked solemnly into the drawing-room, curtly caught hold of a light black chair with cane bottom, and walked solemnly out again. Then each bearing his chair, in the order of Mr Adam, Mr Seth, and Mr Noah, they solemnly walked in file to the lawn, where they encamped by the Orwell, the light gleam of whose sparkling waters caused their eyes to twitter irritably. The sunlight above also, golden and strong, produced a sensation of discomfort, and Mr Adam asked, "Perhaps Brother Noah wouldn't mind fetching the sunshade?" Upon this poor patriarch, being third in order of generation, devolved all

such little errands. He gravely complied, gravely returned with a huge yellow drab sunshade, and under it they met in conclave. It was a peculiarly safe place to meet for the purpose of private conversation, since it was utterly impossible for a word to be overheard. As for the impudent-looking fishes that every now and then sprang out of the water in passing, for an inquisitive and irreverent look at the Great Tomkins Family, why, they just took no notice of them whatever; the only enemy, or observation of watery proclivities causing them uneasiness, being the active irregular Beaver tribe.

"It is evident," began Mr Adam, "that some great unpleasantness is impending. These barbarians represent mischief, and, in its larger sense, ruin; for, considerable though our private wealth may be, if we lose the Weir-treasure, which the survivor of us will immediately realise, that survivor will be obliged to content himself with the combined funds of our private moneys, instead of taking his head-place as the leading capitalist of the world. Now it isn't very likely that we're going to submit to this, eh, Brother Noah?"

"Well, Brother, for myself I don't care personally. I could be content with the widow's cruse of oil, but it's my solicitude for you and Brother Seth makes me sanction and commend the foresight you advocate."

"As for me," replied Mr Seth, earnestly and disinterestedly, "I am not long for this world: the delicacy of my constitution, aggravated by the toil and care of a hard and honourable business life, has materially affected my health: but for your sakes whom I leave behind me, for the sake of the poor of the town, and of the charities of Christendom, I do think Brother Adam is justified in preparing for the future. The only little request I would leave behind me, will be that I may be remembered—something in the form of a window in the dear old church." This patriarch, who was keenly affected, carefully removed a tear with a grey-bordered pocket-handkerchief.

"I hope it's not so bad as that, Brother," said Mr Adam, in a tone of commiseration. He would have eaten the two

others with the fierce relish of a cannibal. Heads together, wolf-like, strange, deep looks slantways from the corners of their eyes, the yellow light through the sunshade imparting a weird aspect, the three presented on their black chairs close together on the green lawn as unique a tableau representative of plot and conspiracy as might well be found. And what a travesty on the glorious and peaceful scene outspread before them! What a sculpture of the grovelling!

"The maids have been very good girls; they shall have a little holiday. Don't you think so, Brother Seth?"

"Decidedly; it would have a good effect. They will return with more industrious ardour to their household duties. Very kind and thoughtful of you, Brother Adam!"

Mr Adam bowed benignly, and then asked, "Have you anything to say against it, Brother Noah?"

"I? Oh, not anything! Very thoughtful, I'm sure."

The demure pair were informed of it later on. Beyond a quick look from one to the other, they manifested no interest and but little pleasure, but early on Monday morning started for Oxford, or were supposed to, where the father of one was a sexton, while the father of the other made coffins.

The Brothers Tomkins were now free from espionage so far as the house was concerned; for the rest Mr Seth brought out the wide unfolding clothes-horse, and opened it screen-fashion by that wall where the gorgeous Noisette had cast its golden bloom. Over the horse they carelessly hung rugs, as though put in the sun to freshen them up a bit. Strange eyes riverwards could thus not discover what was going on. There was room for one to work behind the screen, and Brother Adam said, "Brother Noah will oblige by digging, while we wait in the dining-room to watch who comes up to the front, and, if necessary, to answer the door." While the elder thus instructed, Brother Seth was lightly brushing the fallen petals on to a newspaper; they would be strewn again over the mould. Mr Noah brought a shovel from the garden tool-house, doffed his coat and began, his brothers meantime retiring to sentinel the front. Mr Noah worked diligently for some twenty minutes, when he unearthed an iron box, shaped very like a child's

Noah's ark, and placing it by his side, refilled the emptied digging. He had been too occupied to observe the alighting of friends from a boat, but at this juncture the round red face of the Beaver peered over the horse, while he cried cheerily, "My boy Phineas begs a posy of the yellow ones to take away with him."

Brother Noah placed a hand instantly upon the iron box he had unearthed, while his habitual cautiousness led him to mask his mortification.

"First-rate skins these," said Beaver, handling them in such a way they all slipped to the ground. "I used to keep these, you know, when in the Strand. Doing a little gardening? My boy Phineas is a wonder for digging. Phineas, lad, come here, sir, and show Mr Tomkins a little of the muscular!" Phineas junior came round, seized the spade, and with his father closed Brother Noah's retreat. He still, however, held on to his ark. It had no handle nor rings, and he had to hug it; his shirt-sleeved arms embraced its earthy, rusty, yellowy outline devotedly. Beaming over with genial good-humour, Mr Beaver inquired how his Brothers were. "Left you to do all this back-aching work by yourself, eh? Fortunate thing we thought of a row on the river; uncommonly fond of the water is Phineas!" He was edging unpleasantly close to the third Brother, who watched from the corners of his eyes with the alert wariness of the lynx, and every now and then cast a glance in the direction of the house, where the other two were sentinelled at the front. It was exasperating; Mr Beaver noticed it. "I see; thinking of them—fraternal affection, God bless you!" and he wiped his brow in a homely and feeling fashion, with a pocket-handkerchief covered with yellow spots as big as guineas. Brother Noah was disgusted beyond all precedent, and would have walked off, but was so closed in he could not. Beaver, however, divined his intention, and aware that no time was to be lost, called off his myrmidon, and resorted to a daring *coup*, caught by the latter in the flash of an eye. "Now, Phineas, you've shown Mr Tomkins what you can do, let's beg of him to give us an example of his own skill." So saying he slid his arm through

that of Mr Noah, Phineas doing the same on the other side, and almost before he knew what they were about, trotted him over the lawn and down to the water, he clinging all the time to the ark, which of course placed him more entirely at their mercy. At the water, however, Mr Noah struggled with a prejudice utterly irreconcilable with his name, and called lustily on Brother Adam. The Beavers by sheer force dragged him into the boat and pushed off, knocking an oar against the martyr brother, and telling him if he did not use it they would be upset. The fastidious Mr Noah's feelings upon drifting past the gardens and windows of his several neighbours in his shirt-sleeves, fumbling an oar with one hand—for he knew nothing of rowing and hated the water, nor would he let go the box with his other hand—in company, moreover, with such a questionable pair, his feelings, we say, can be imagined; they were of poignant intensity, and no little apprehension was combined. Yonder were dull fields, wooded slopes, and an unfrequented and dreary tract, where his calls for assistance could not be heard, and these depredators might commit murder or any other heinous crime. It was a serious contingency altogether, and he shrank from the bilious-looking brigand and red-faced ruffian with ill-concealed dismay. He had been kidnapped, and his whole instincts as a householder and a citizen rebelled. He was the victim of a desperate attack, none the less deadly and designing for the apparent friendliness cloaking its real purpose; if he only got safely out of this he would have these Beavers up for man-stealing and murder, he was quite determined. Add to it all that Noah and his ark were at the mercy of the element he entertained particular aversion to, and no common sympathy will be awarded to that unfortunate.

The abduction of one of the irreproachable Brothers Tomkins made it much worse than if it had been any ordinary individual,—one who could better be spared, and whose moral excellence and invincible virtue were not so thoroughly established.

Great was the consternation at the house when Mr Seth, coming out to see how Brother Noah was getting on, dis-

covered his faithful relative's absence in company with the iron box, and with the nearest approach to a panic the face and manner of Mr Seth had ever worn, he went in hurriedly to Brother Adam and communicated the ominous intelligence. The chief patriarch turned horribly pale, and staggered back, then laid a trembling hand significantly on Brother Seth's spotless linen cuff, "He's made off with it! I never believed in Brother Noah!"

"Nor I," assented Brother Seth, broodingly. Hard this on the devoted and unselfish one stolen from their midst! Those left looked at one another with curious significance. Then in a low voice and not as particularly interested, Mr Adam asked, "Is Brother Noah's desk unlocked? If so, let me see his bank-book."

"Certainly, Brother Adam," responded Mr Seth with a smirking, softly chuckling manner, proceeding to Mr Noah's desk, which he unlocked with a key on his bunch. As he handed the book to Mr Adam he remarked confidentially, "I'm dreadfully afraid a—a female is at the bottom of this."

"I'm sorry for Noah," replied Mr Adam, commiseratingly. "He was never strong in integrity, I do fear, but then one expects something more from a Tomkins than such awful backsliding as this. Well, he knows the penalty." Mr Seth, standing, went up on his fore part of the Tomkins's feet with that quick little lift at the heel upon which emotion acted like a spring. It might have been contemplation of the increase of revenue through their brother's fall, or possibly sympathy with poor Noah, who had bartered his birthright for a mess —a precious mess!

"It certainly is a singular and awkward incident that Brother Noah should go off at the only moment when likely to be unobserved, and just at the time of removing the clue which has been concealed for so many years. Very awkward."

"It indicates its own argument. He is about to possess himself of the Treasure and abscond, but why burden himself with the box and document? Like ourselves, Noah knows where the Treasure lies, and needed no such encumbrance. Our only object in removing it was to destroy it, as we felt

bound to do the instant its security was threatened. I think we are agreed upon this, Brother Seth?"

"Oh, quite, quite!"

"Yes; well, our policy now is defence. With traitors inside the camp, Brother Seth, one must look out for one's self!" They nodded heads at one another and leered, each more suspicious of the other than were both of Brother Noah. "Hook or by crook we must get in somehow at the Herongate, where our attitude will be strictly upon guard. Without disclosing this serious business to Mr Masheter, who is already much troubled with his poor afflicted daughter, it is our duty to watch over the interests of his property, which is not to be disturbed by—goodness knows who! We have some slight acquaintance with the gentleman; we will have the painters and whitewashers in, for it will not do for a Tomkins to resort to invention or untruth."

"Oh, certainly not, certainly not!"

"Thanks, Brother Seth, thanks! I say, then, we will call, and in the course of conversation explain the embarrassment we are under; compelled to take a room or two during the time the painters are here. I think I am right, Brother Seth, paint *does* disagree with you? Don't let me make any erroneous statement."

"It does—it does. I think it's the turps!"

"Thanks, Brother, I thought I was not mistaken. We then frankly intimate our repugnance to hotels—we are, I think, repugnant to hotels, Brother Seth?"

"Swear to it, nothing should induce me to enter one; if for no other motive, I consider the presence of bar-maids and chamber-maids unfavourable to the preservation of that strict consistence we feel more than ever called upon to maintain."

"Beg pardon, I don't think I quite followed you; did you say you favoured——?"

"I! oh, certainly not!" cried Mr Seth, much shocked and flushed; "quite the reverse!"

Mr Adam nodded again, as though greatly relieved, and proceeded with his programme. "And we explain our difficulty in finding a cleanly, genteel place—we *shall* find a diffi-

culty about it, I suppose, Brother; don't let me tell a falsehood?"

"I'm sure you would be sorry to do so, Brother, we are alike in that respect; I can set your mind at rest by telling you I am sorry to say not a decent place is to be got for love nor money." Brother Seth was seized with a violent fit of coughing, and was troubled with flushing again. Mr Adam had noticed the word, but went on with his plan. "We throw out a hint what a fine place the Herongate is, spacious—it is, Brother Seth?"

"Oh, splendid! What ever the old director could have done with such a big place, I can't conceive!"

"Well, we know what he did with it." Mr Adam, with artful humour in his eye, just smoothed a frisky-looking crease on his Oxford-mixture knee, and tapped his pockets lightly. "Then, Brother, if I know Mr Masheter, he will place a room or two at our disposal. A mere neighbourly act; we would do as much for him, I think, Brother Seth?"

Mr Seth considered. "I don't know; wears the stair-carpets out, and he's a heavier man than any of us."

"The Tomkinses, Brother Seth, were never remarkable for mere animal weight, it is more soul. I think I am right in saying so,—don't let me make any mistake."

"Speaking for myself, Brother Adam, I am but little upon this earth, it is yonder."

"I know. And the Judas of our kinship, where is he? The gate of our fold is opened, our trust is broken! All the loving careful watchfulness over our younger brother could not avert this unforeseen calamity. We ought to be *very* thankful *we* are strong in our resistance of all temptation: let us have prayers, Brother Seth. I regret that in the worry of this busy morning through the annoyance caused us by that brace of heathen, our customary worship has been neglected. Alas! we have need of more than human strength in our contact with the world; with guile without, and hypocrisy within. Amen!—Beg pardon, I thought we had done prayers; trouble unsettles one. Now, dear brother!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GOVERNESS AT BRUNSWICK HOUSE.

SUNDAY, mid-day. Mrs St Luke Lillingston had arrived safely at home. It was always necessary to chronicle this fact, since Mrs Lillingston's accidents were so numerous that her safe arrival at home was a matter of speculation.

Brunswick House was a spacious dwelling of once large apartments, but most of these had been divided and subdivided into sectional little stalls for the board and lodging of the numerous juvenile Lillingstons.

There were so many, it occupied the greater part of Mrs Lillingston's time to call the roll over to discover how many there really were, and if all were extant to answer to their names. The names were written neatly in a copy-book, alphabetically, and the authoress of the census would solemnly confer with the governess every evening, after the St Luke Lillingston shoots had been bedded, upon the misfortunes, breakages, upsets, wounds, and conflicts of the day.

It was a curious schedule, this of the accidents, and Mrs Lillingston used to piously assure Miss Sylvester, "If Providence had seen fit to send me into a world where nothing ever happened, it would have been a positive relief to me!"

As may be imagined, the lady proved one of the worst of managers; her nerves were in that unsatisfactory condition when management becomes impossible.

It was the governess who kept this sectional habitation together. Although the head of the house was of out-of-door, stay-away, flood-and-field proclivities, he could appreciate the quiet discipline and order of the lady-like young person

engaged to undertake the supervision of the children, but who gradually glided into supervision of the entire household.

Great had been the waste, the disorder and distraction before her advent. It took some little time to effect a reform; but after a while system and method, punctuality and economy, transformed everything. The servants did not like it, naturally—gave notice and left. Miss Sylvester, having received permission, engaged others, and these paid her due respect. The children did not like it, and at first fought like infantry regulars; but her sweet manner, forbearance, and patient forgiving spirit, won some of these over also, and controlled all.

This admirable addition to the unruly establishment was a slender genteel-looking person, of quiet good taste, and with a soul above gewgaws. A thin refined type of face, with a very pretty pale-pink glow on the cheeks, and a clear red lip telling of faultless health; dark eyes; dark hair, worn neatly; well-made dresses—she made them herself, as also her young sister's,—fitting close and high at the throat; the dresses were of dark becoming material, the neck was white and delicately shapen as that of a Norwegian.

Miss Sylvester had been an inmate of Brunswick House some eighteen months, and knew the uncertainty attending the movements of its owner, therefore made arrangements for an interview this Sunday afternoon. She had a proposition to put to Mr St Luke Lillingston, and while far from apprehensive as to the result, she yet disliked her mission extremely.

Mr Lillingston was lying back in an easy-chair, with one foot on the mantelpiece and the other on a table. Mr Lillingston was of the expansive order, and his erratic positions always created doubts as to whether his legs were pairs, belonged to one another, or belonged to him. Upon entrance of the governess he came down off the mantelpiece and table, and, nodding pleasantly, asked what was the matter, this time; —he was so used to something the matter, it became the natural question.

"It concerns myself to-day, sir," she replied, smiling, and

he became alarmed, fearing she might be about to express her wish to leave.

"Pray sit down, Miss Sylvester," and the owner of Brunswick House affably motioned to a chair, while he rather anxiously scanned her face to discover some indication of her business.

"I am sorry to intrude thus upon you to-day, but I know you to be so often out, and my own time is so taken up——"

"Don't mention it; what have you to tell me?"

"You know, I think, that I support my little sister,—that I have done so since we were left orphans."

"Yes, Mrs Lillingston told me. I think she said your parents fell off the tight-rope and broke their necks!"

"Mrs Lillingston would very likely interpret in that manner what I confided to her soon after coming here. I said that my father was a wretchedly paid curate, and that after his death my mother fell amongst those who robbed us of all. It broke her heart, and within two years we mourned the loss of both our parents; we poor, defenceless, helpless orphans, left on the cold stream to perish, or be rescued, as the case might be! With a superfluity of wealth, *you* cannot realize what that means. It means being stared in the face by horrible possibilities, and feeling without prop or stay to help one to meet them! I have, hitherto, kept my sister at a small school at the seaside, conducted by respectable people; their terms were low, too low, for they have had to give it up; their scholars are about returning to their homes, and the school is to be converted into a shop."

"Nothing like shops; I'd convert every place except the churches into 'em!" Since Mr St Luke Lillingston never entered the churches, this was no illiberal sentiment.

"I am compelled to ask leave of absence for a couple of days while I go and find some place for my sister, who has literally nowhere to go." Mr Lillingston was silent for a minute or two, then he said—

"I was thinking whether we could do with her here—I mean to look after some of the little ones, and make herself as useful as she could."

"That would be very kind of you, sir. I am sure you would find her most useful, and she is unusually active and thoughtful for a child of her age—she is not yet twelve."

"Well, you may mention it to Mrs Lillingston, and if she is agreeable, bring your sister back with you." Thanking him warmly, for she was well pleased with the result of the interview, and saying she would like to go on the morrow, Miss Sylvester returned to the dining-room, where she discovered the lady of the house sitting, apparently, transfixed with horror and staring hard at the chandelier just above her. "Tread softly," she begged, in a low agitated voice; "it's come out of its socket. I heard a click, and looking up saw it drop an inch. I'm afraid to move, and if I stop here shall be killed; there's Lavinia's Prayer-book, do read a piece."

"It is quite fast." The presence of mind of the young lady reassured the nervous Mrs Lillingston.

"Have you been hearing their Sunday lessons?"

"No; I have been talking to Mr Lillingston, asking if it would be convenient for me to go to Ramsgate for a day or two——"

"No, it won't," interrupted the lady, pettishly.

"I anticipated you would say that," replied Miss Sylvester, calmly and with perfect respect; "but when I explain to you that my little sister is at a school, the ladies of which have failed to succeed, and are compelled to give up, I am sure you will grant me this indulgence."

"Can't you do it by writing?"

"How can I? Knowing nothing of Ramsgate, or of any one there."

"Well, I only know the house will be out of windows; and when you come back you'll find all the children's noses broken."

"Oh, I hope not," said the governess, with a sweet hopeful smile. "I believe they will see how well they can behave."

"I will not interfere in it; they are under your management, and if you run away from your post you must accept the consequences."

The selfishness of the woman did not irritate the good-tempered governess. "I would not think of such a thing but

for this awkward and unexpected event. And these are not the only ladies who have failed to make a school pay. I am truly sorry for them; they were superior in every way, and imparted refinement with instruction; and I take one to be almost as valuable as the other. Like ladies generally of reduced degree they were not business women. It is a pity some friend was not at hand to advise and tell them no school, conducted upon a basis of such miserably low remuneration, could possibly succeed. In this case the pupils have been all the gainers."

"That's more than ours are, for they get more unmanageable every day, while their ignorance is shocking!"

The governess, a shade paler, merely said she hoped improvement would be seen in time.

"And when do you say you think of going, Miss Sylvester?"

"To-morrow, madam."

"Well, you really can't do it. You know very well the children are waiting for brown Holland pinafores, and are ruining their frocks in the meantime. I can't remember where Mr Lillingston has placed all our elder ones, but here and there in schools, as you've heard. Suppose I was to begin running about after these, where do you think I should be, and what do you think would become of the house?"

Miss Sylvester could not answer so pertinent a question, she mildly remarked instead, "Mr Lillingston can afford to place the children at well-established schools where no fear of a misfortune of this nature need arise. I was induced to send my sister to her school by the terms which were within my humble means."

"I don't think a young person like yourself, as you say, of limited means, has any right to send a sister to boarding-schools."

"No," answered the governess, sadly; "a young person like myself is quite deprived of the right to do as others do!"

"Now, don't begin in that dolorous strain or I shall have my hysterics come on!" And this was the invariable programme, to goad the weak governess almost to the point

producing anger in others but sadness in herself, and then to retreat behind her probable hysterics—terrible attacks always, for the lady luxuriated at such times, when no bounds restrained the odd frenzy to which she devoted herself; but the threat was always sufficient to calm her companion. "If you will show me how you can get away to-morrow, I won't say a word about it; but I don't see how it's to be done."

"I have prepared all in readiness," replied the governess, quietly. "I sat up until Friday every night last week at the pinafores, and they are all made and placed away in the wardrobe."

"I've nothing to say against that, and it was very right and proper of you. When I was your age—thirty-eight, didn't you tell me?"

"Twenty-eight, madam."

"Yes; well I would have done the same, unharassed by the care of a large family like mine! There's another reason why you can't go, Monday or Tuesday, the preserves must be made; we've left it too late as it is." Mrs Lillingston having darted off and taken refuge in the culinary, Miss Sylvester knew it to be wasted time to prolong the representation; but her heart sank. She had received intimation that the ladies' furniture would be sold, but was of too delicate a sensitiveness to profane that distant trouble by disclosing this news to Mrs Lillingston. It made her very anxious. She knew enough of the treatment the weak meet with at such times. How to wait until Wednesday she knew not, with her cherished one to whom she was mother and sister, exposed to unkindness, and possibly rude insult.

"I hope nothing will prevent my going on Wednesday, if I wait until then, ma'am."

"It's impossible to say what's going to happen between now and the middle of the week in a large house like this; and I'm surprised at you, with Mangnall's questions, so to say, at your finger's ends, asking me to prognosticate so foolishly, when the whole course of history and biography teaches us there is darning and mending daily, and that catastrophe is the nest the hen sits on in every household!"

Mrs St Luke Lillingston did not favour the public at any time by making her discourse connective. The temerity with which she quashed metaphor and ran her ideas and opinions one after the other, opened up a phenomenal branch of the reasoning powers quite out of the common.

"I have not yet told you Mr Lillingston very kindly proposed I should make room for my sister here. He thought she might be useful with the children."

"No, thank you; no pretty nurse-maids here for me. You just keep your sister where she is, if you please!"

With a hot cheek and quivering lip the governess rose to leave the room. "Yes, Mrs Lillingston, it will be better."

"Now, if you speak in that glacial manner, you'll give me the spectrums and bring on hysterics. I know you will, I can feel it creeping upon me."

Miss Sylvester at once put on a lighter expression and left the room, wondering, as she had often wondered before, what the spectrums were. Mrs Lillingston possessed the sole right to the use of this word, as applied to an ailment, and evidently had a proprietary claim on the complaint. Miss Sylvester, whose acquaintance with the ills of humanity was by no means rudimentary, had never before met with the spectrums, and to this time had no clearly defined notion of what they were: but as it caused Mrs Lillingston to become immediately excited if any scepticism was displayed concerning her spectrums, she was allowed to continue their victim. What with hysterics, nerves, fidgets, and the spectrums, this lady was not the most agreeable companion of her sex.

CHAPTER XVII.

OF A SCHOOL THAT FAILED: HOW THE LANDLORD CONVERTED IT INTO A SHOP.

HARBOUR ROAD, Ramsgate, was the shabby-genteel district. Almost every town of any importance has its shabby-genteel district, avoided by the boys out for morning orders, by the bands making the clear air melodious, by the beggars, who find the ground unprofitable. Curtains at windows were faded, the artificial flowers in the cheap vases on the fragile round tables were faded, the down-stair front and the up-stair front were alike significant of having seen better days.

The tax-collector was maturely imperious in Harbour Road. If there was a suspicion of leniency about the man in better-class streets, there was none in Harbour Road. The postmen trifled carelessly with Harbour Road letters, as though aware there would be little of value enclosed to that district. Pot-boys asked for the money when they called for the cans, and the milkmen always had change in their pockets. Fishmen lowered their price before rounding the corner into the Road, and then bawled one against another a reminder to the denizens of their poverty. The Punch and Judy man did not appear in Harbour Road, and the one-armed vocalist might be heard from there, but those desiring nearer acquaintance had to follow the sound until it was discovered in a genteel neighbourhood.

Nor was Harbour Road one of those localities devoted to the letting of apartments. People residing thereabout had just enough furniture for themselves, but none for other folks, and when they received additional inmates the additional

inmates brought their own furniture,—in other words, hired the empty rooms.

To Harbour Road, three years before this history commences, came a Mrs Potter; renting No. 2, and at once, upon properly settling down and having in the last few articles of furniture, placing a large white card in the parlour-window, with YOUNG LADIES' SCHOOL thereon. No. 1 was a baker's shop. The new neighbour called and said she would be pleased to deal with them, and would they favour her by handing the school-circulars to people known to them. Yes; and they took fifty, wrapping the children's sweets in them; no great advantage to Mrs Potter! There was a daughter also, a tall melancholy girl who would assist in the tuition, and who went round after dusk leaving the circulars in letter-boxes and under doors. She was accompanied by her next youngest sister, and they cheered one another, talking and trying to forget how tired they were, and looking hopefully to the result of their venture.

Four girls and their mother, and a big sorrow amongst them that was not to be told on the circular nor to the neighbours. Ladies once of station, now with the lion's share of a small income gone for furniture. Women of tender rearing, fled from tyranny, come to battle with life's calls, and, in case of failure, with no falling upon friends; for it was a woman who had left her husband, a man of wealth, and there is no excuse for that. Had he been a poor reckless unfortunate the case would have been different; but he was held in high honour, was distinctly a favourite of fortune, and of course friends discountenanced this unwise step by not writing to her. The poor lady had some dignity left, and did not trouble them. She could have presented them with a summary of wrong that might have altered their judgment, but she did not—rather applied herself with an energy and tact truly remarkable to starting her school and making a connection.

The pursuits open to the decayed of gentle birth are so few, and this seemed more adapted than others. Even had she been told it was full of risk, she would still have made the attempt. If it did not succeed it would be through no neglect

on their part, for in some false old copy-book they had read and written that "*Industry bringeth Prosperity;*" and they beautifully believed that it would, working on as such poor creatures do, in all faith, while the wolf grins and waits. Sorriest of the spectacles Heaven looks down upon, the weary toiling, the faint struggling on; and the bourne—an execution in the house, and the desolation of homelessness!

The school did not answer; and after three years' horrible evasion of trouble, it environed them; debts they could not meet seized upon them and theirs; day-scholars and boarders went to their homes, glad of the holiday; and the lady was left with her children, with one little boarder as miserable as themselves, and with a globe not yet carried away, to be called for in the morning. That part of it was a pretty keen satire; the globe was before them, verily — smooth, hollow, cold, without so much as a daisy growing on it or in it for them. Pause! What is that which still furnishes the house, and with more splendour than those poor tables and chairs and carpets and covers ever would impart? The last of their pupils, unclaimed, dependent on these who have nothing for themselves, yet so exquisite with her cheering words, and smiles that never wholly die, they bless God for her. And the extra sadness is theirs that on the morrow they will also part with her. The sister, who has every term paid the fees, has been written to, and is expected on the morrow, when also, being Saturday, and the last day of their tenancy, this sad colony will migrate elsewhere. They were about returning to London, from whence they came, and they would soon be forgotten in Harbour Road.

In the morning the man came for the globe, and a poor woman called for a shilling or two due for boot-mending. They waited until the last moment with the child, reluctant to leave her, and then wished to take her with them; but she was so certain her dear sister would come that she begged hard to remain, and they could do no other than comply, leaving her in Those tender hands more able to protect. "Yes," were the child's last words to them while they stood, with their brown-paper parcels containing their little all, bidding her not be

afraid for God would watch over her. "Yes, I know He will, and I am not afraid." She saw her friends go; they walked so much more slowly than when they came; watched at the window where no blind or curtain even was left, until they were out of sight, and then all at once Harbour Road seemed strangely dull and cold, and the bare boards and walls looked horribly lonesome. It was no use gazing longingly out of the window, as though the wistfulness would bring them back again, and she walked out of the room, the naked passage and stairs, disconsolate and grim, meeting her vividly under the morning sun. She looked up-stairs by a momentary hesitation to realize it, hoping with the wild unconscious hope of a child that she might hear the light step once more, or see them turning from the landing to come down, sad it might be, but with a kind smile for her. No; all was still, all was void and bleak—the void bleakness of boards and wainscoting, which is more stark and horrible than the bleakness of any outdoor solitude. She realized it all, and sat down on the bottom stair, hearing people pass on the pathway, seeing them cross the line of light under the street door. She could not join them, first through expecting Ada, next because she was intrusted with the key, and duly felt the responsibility of this; and, moreover, the landlord might call: after her sister had been they were to leave the key at his house. And she had no heart to go out: terribly sensitive, the disgrace of it, now that her friends had gone, seemed to be resting upon her slight shoulders; the ordeal of meeting old schoolmates with their light-wounding talk and laughter was more than she could encounter; so she would not go out, until for good.

She went into the back room: no sun was there, but memories of school that brought tears and a choking feeling. How often the view from here had been mixed up with the varying sensations of difficult lessons! no unkindness from those gentle ones who had gone, but a deal of perplexing and puzzling over that she was so anxious to master, with the daily and hourly memory of Ada's self-sacrifice. The room looked more cheerless even than did the front room, for this was more learnt by her; literally learnt to its very pencil-marks on

the walls done by straying fingers, when her inattentive fellow-pupils to her wonderment paid no heed nor care to the earnest talking of their preceptresses; and she had drunk in every word, anxious, willing, eager to acquire the most in the time. Thus the ladies loved her. There had been no carpet in this room; tears started over a mark on the floor, where a rude girl had set her heel on a piece of chalk to annoy the governess; further tears came through thinking she had not shown half enough respectful love and attention, or been as useful as she might have been. The cupboard where the books and slates had, of old, been stored, and her imagination was so wrought upon she could almost see Mrs Potter stooping to take something from it in the attitude so intimately known to her. Scraps of old copies, torn up, strewn over the floor, written when hearts were too heavy to think of old hopeful axioms, when trembling hands wrote more cold and seemly truths; she fell down on her knees and picked them all up, kissing them. Look at her down there, and think of it later: golden-brown hair falling to the scraps, a flushed, lovely face, features of the most delicate moulding, eyes naturally large and lustrous, now painfully bright and burning with tears shed since their going. Rather a tall fine girl of her age; graceful with it, much poetry in movement, full rich music in the voice, sensitive, tender, and delicate; trained not to book-lore only, but to a depth of thoughtful feeling also that promised to produce one peerless among refined and gentle girlhood. This was the solitary scholar in the deserted schoolroom, sole inmate of the house. Saturday, mid-day only, and we know Ada will not be here until Wednesday, the hardest of us will feel for her thus placed, the affectionate will fear for her, until remembering her own bright little words, "He will watch over me; I am not afraid." And on Monday the carpenters are coming. The front of the parlour is to be knocked out, and a shop-front put in, and carpenters and masons will be busy after Monday. It is thought a grocery and general store will answer in Harbour Road, and this title-page to the poverty of a street is to open henceforth its chapters of struggle and shift.

One o'clock. Had *they* been there, it would have timed laying the cloth for dinner. She had a sufficiency of food, and the brokers had not taken the water, but she would not lift the bread and cheese down from its shelf, could not eat; sight of the kitchen seemed to blind her: a bare kitchen to a little girl accustomed to running in and out is more drear than any other despoiled chamber. A poor thin cat, merely a stray one, but it loved her, came in, purred, and was company; she seized on it and kissed it ravenously, it seemed so much just then. After a while that also went, and she was again alone. She closed and bolted the back door, not particularly timid, but feeling terribly lonely, trying to think earnestly of Ada's coming, and looking for that as never did child before. She heard children running along the road to two o'clock school, and the sounds sank in her heart like knells. Up-stairs, from the front window, she could see to the end of the road; she went up and looked through the dusty glass for Ada!

The baker next door had a little girl, and she wondered if she might come in and stay a while with her, but then thought with a touch of shrewd worldly wisdom of the changed conditions, and how even bakers do not care for their children to visit houses where the furniture has been sold. Afar off she heard an organ-man,—that was for others: no organ-man came into Harbour Road.

It was dreadfully silent and oppressive in the house, and she shuddered at thought of the night. There was no bed left—had there been, she could not have slept; the chair, her one article of furniture, must serve for all purposes. But she so surely felt that Ada would come, the approaching darkness did not weigh upon her as it might else have done.

She watched by the window until very tired, until never a man, woman, nor child was in sight, and then left that room, staying at the little window on the landing, stepping up on to the ledge of the wainscot and looking out, and gaining a view of slate-roofing, of some green moss, of a few brown sparrows, and making a picture of it, thoughtfully, while neither book nor picture was below the roof that day. But

she could not stand there long, the position was a painful one, and she came off her ledge and sat down on a stair, three steps that led up to the yard or two of landing opening to the front bedroom; thus sitting back she could see the clouds gradually passing by the square of landing-window and away; and the thoughts that came to her, beautiful, chaste as the white with azure upon which she tracked her fancy, were more precious than pearls, and were treasured there.

A small room at the back had been hers and she went to it; such as she owned of worldly wealth was upon the mantelpiece: a small box with shells upon the lid; within, her collars and pocket-handkerchiefs; a needle-case, given her long ago by Mrs Potter for ready help in everything; an artificial flower growing in an artificial pot, an execrable toy but very dear to her; an old box in use as a work-box; an illuminated card, done by the youngest Miss Potter and very tastefully, for she inherited from her father the genius of painting; a portrait of Ada in a dingy frame, done long since when Ada, too, was girl-like,—before ever the cares of maintenance lent grave and subdued expression to the face. Daisy Sylvester knew quite well the miserable value, by commercial rating, of these poor treasures; but it was her all—and an all, whether very much or very little, is the boundary of which the heart is the centre. She stood on the hearthstone reviewing them, marched along them in line, and came up with the portrait, giving it a short sharp kiss. And then all at once there flashed upon her a sort of wondering what would become of her when Ada did take her hence, and when these treasures of hers must find some other home, and after this she became a bit anxious. She could hear the afternoon milkmen rattling their cans, and Ada had not yet come.

A faint sinking feeling led her to go down-stairs and cut a slice of bread and butter. She heard children returning from school, heard the familiar and pleasant noise of tea-things placed in order on the tray, from somewhere over the way; heard, later, the half-past five postman, and she shivered lest he would bring her a letter to say her sister could not come. No, he went past and on, the double knocks sounding

farther and farther away, and she set her face to the window again, looking hard for Ada. It grew dusky, a grey mist rising as it sometimes does from off the sea; she wished the clear bright afternoon could have continued until half-past eight, instead of all being over and the grey evening descended an hour before that. Then she saw the lamps lighted, saw people opposite draw down the blinds before lighting theirs—people in Harbour Road were not of the class who can with pride exhibit lighted-up interiors to the outside public—heard the little pop the gas gave when lighted in the shop-window next door, saw a streak of lighter mist where it shone upon the grey, saw people going off for the Saturday night's shopping, taking the children with them; and then felt more disconsolate than ever, turning round to look wearily at the bare room, watching the gleam on the wall-paper caused by the gas-lamp, and thinking the floor seemed to have grown larger. She had no light—indeed, with nothing up at any window, would not have cared to use one.

People either side could not have known the child was thus left alone, probably supposed she had gone before the late tenants, or they would scarcely have left her deserted.

As the evening dragged its slow course, seeming of interminable length to her, no Ada arriving, she became seriously troubled and her tears fell fast.

People came home from shopping—she had no means of telling the time but by this, and by it she knew the hour to be past nine o'clock—and she had to accept the conviction, a very sad one in her position, that no sister would come to her that night. Therefore there was no need to watch longer, and, "I had better go to bed!" she said to herself, and so sweetly, the home-words did not echo with the grim mockery natural. Where to go to bed was a matter to think over a moment or two. She did not relish going up-stairs, and her chair was down in the front room. The dark corners struck chill, and after placing her chair up in the corner behind the door, pulling the door back, and making an alcove for herself, she did not like it, because of the crack where the door hinged, and through which — Harbour Road architects not

being particular to a crevice here and there—she could see into the passage. She moved from there and tried another corner, and did not settle there either, the open space in front being so comfortless. She was too big to curl up as a younger child might, kitten-like upon the floor, and so pass tearfully off to sleep. She looked disconsolately around, very cold, cheeks hot with all she was undergoing, the lips quivering; and she took her chair over to the wall where the gleam from a gas-lamp seemed to make it warmer and more cheerful, and knelt at her hard bedside to say the old evening prayer. And there is no forgetting the picture; that child thus kneeling in the emptied house, with the gleam of light just at that part and nowhere else. She fell asleep thus, her beautiful face drooping, the long luxuriant hair falling about the bars of the chair.

And a carpenter, one of the chief of those who were coming on the Monday, came with a duplicate key furnished by the landlord, to take a measurement, to save going backwards and forwards before their work began—and walking into the room saw that picture, and, strong man though he might be, it moved him with a tender tremulous feeling, more closely approaching reverence than any other sentiment. He understood it at once, and was full of pity and gentle commiseration. With childhood as with age, Saul Weir was always gentle.

"Alone, timid, miserable, she has taken refuge in prayer, in the one beam of light, and has fallen asleep, with tears scarcely dried, and——" He paused in his musing while leaning lightly over her to hear straggling bits of her prayer clinging still to the quivering lips, "Make—me—a—good—girl," and his fine face softened to tender gladness. He liked the five simple words that may be prayed until five words and girlhood or boyhood are left back upon the road and the less lovely region is entered. And he heard "God bless dear Ada." Might be a friend, more likely a sister. Yes, he settled it; a sister, well-beloved, who, perhaps, was to have called to take this pretty blossom from so unkind an isolation. Saul Weir formed conclusions quickly, and for the most part right ones. He was also swift of purpose. It would not do to leave her

thus. He would have made no trouble of remaining there also, but doubted the sense and policy of it, and of these twain he held high opinion. So he touched her lightly on the arm, not with sufficient force to frighten her, and said in a low soft voice, while she was slowly, almost painfully, awaking, "Do not feel afraid, I am only one of the carpenters come to measure the window; I had a key of the door." And this set her at rest immediately, the momentary start passing, yet with some confusion, that was very pretty and captivating, she explained, "I was afraid to go up-stairs; had I known some one was coming I would have kept from going to sleep, but I felt so dull and tired,—I have been here all day."

"Waiting for Ada to come for you?" added he quietly, with a smile that charmed her and won upon her, notwithstanding astonishment at his words.

"Yes," she said, "waiting for Ada, my sister."

"Well, it's no use waiting here unless she lives in the town, in which case I will wait with you."

"No, no; she lives away,—miles! In Suffolk."

"Then let me tell you Ada has very likely been prevented coming, and I do not suppose will come to-morrow. We will leave word at the baker's where you are to be found. I am sure Ada would go there to ask, and you shall come home with me, where, I believe, the people will be kind to you, and if they won't, why, I will." The frank kind words and manner impressed the child gratefully. Most people felt to trust Saul Weir at the first time of meeting him, and this child with her quick instinct, even more acutely perceptive than ordinary, discovered and liked the open honest manliness that can be so inimitably gentle, and that is so worthy of all such touching trust. But mind, he was no more than carpenter thus far, kind, good-natured, evidently from word and manner superior, but carpenter still: she had yet to learn that here was the masculine correlative to that exquisite struggling light-wards, knowledge-wards, goodness-wards, which made the life she lived, the thoughts she cherished, the aspirations and dreams and fancies, poetic and musical, she loved, so rare an experience, and as apart and ideal in its

uncultured symmetry as was that of the man befriending her. It was when they were poring over his books in the little room at the cabinetmaker's, where she learnt of him that he had learnt, and studied him as the best of the lessons before her—it was then the child discovered the craft, the trade, to be no more than husk, within which and below which was the perfection of humanity and grandeur of soul; and from that he became to her, if commonplace in the world's eyes from his worldly circumstances, heroic, beautiful, peerless.

They went out: he removed her from desolate darkness! Looking in at the shop next door and leaving their message; thence to the well-lighted shopping quarters, where business was at its briskest and the excitement and variety distracted her attention. He took her that way purposely; he knew the wholesome influence wrought by a line of shops sometimes, and that streets are good doctors to the mind.

Arrived at his lodgings the carpenter sought his landlady, and to that kindly woman narrated in brief his finding the little girl, and his intention of taking charge of her until claimed by somebody else related to her. The woman knew there was no nonsense about Saul Weir; that all the talking in the world would never make him abandon a decision once made, and that when he saw a way was right, consistent with duty, marked out by honour, he would go that way, though he perished at the end; so she said nothing, other than that she would make her comfortable, and "she can sleep with my daughters in the double-bedded room."

"Thank you, Mrs Clough, no; I have already decided in my own mind that she shall have the use of my bed-room and I will sleep on the sofa." And anything decided in his own mind she knew it was quite useless to controvert. His thoughtful delicacy came out in the unselfish arrangement: he judged, and rightly, that the sensitive child would feel more happy, more at liberty alone; and he did not, moreover, consider the change, from her late refined companionship, to that of the broad free young ladies of the Clough household, in any sense desirable.

All this being satisfactorily settled, Mr Weir next saw to the more immediate creature comforts, and had a tempting little supper placed before his grateful charge, himself joining her at the repast.

There was something new, fresh, and agreeable about this; he was unused to company of an evening, and at his table, and as he patted her on the head, pleased and gratified, he said, "I am afraid I cannot let Ada take you away. What shall we do then?"

She smiled, opened her eyes a little wider, and shook her head as much as to say she really could not tell how to proceed in such a delicate dilemma.

After supper, and when quietly to themselves, Saul Weir said, "Tell me about your schooling. How far had you got in —well, say in reading? that I take to be the test of education."

She told him, and he was surprised, for her acquaintance with literature was far beyond his expectations.

"This is excellent," he exclaimed with some glee; "you and I will read together, and help one another. And do you like biography, lives of those who have risen, the men and women who have fought great battles, sometimes conquering, often overcome?"

"It makes one wish to do the same," said Daisy, "but I think poetry is of more help towards really lifting one up."

"Do you, now?" said he, wonderingly, for this had not struck him hitherto; his ethics were all by plane and line and rule. "I haven't much poetry, but it strikes me, now I come to think of it, poetry read by you would bear a musical meaning I have failed to attach." Then, seeing her blushing, he feared he had committed himself to compliment, flattery, or something of the sort, which it would cause him no small annoyance to think he had uttered; but his disquiet was temporary, for his companion was merely taking an old number of a London periodical from her pocket.

"I have a beautiful poem here, the most beautiful I have ever read. Miss Potter used to take this paper sometimes for the needlework; she gave me this number because I liked the piece so much, and because it has my name." She handed

him the paper, and he read, "Lines on a Daisy found in London streets."

"I think you must kindly read it aloud to me, and as nicely as ever you can."

Smilingly she complied; read the poet's chaste impassioned lines upon finding in grim city ways the innocent flower that brought back in a flash of instant pain the old country, far away, mountain-girt, sheep-dotted, daisy-strewn.

This girl, of few years by earthly span, had a soul that was thrilled by the utterance of an unknown singer, and if no other audience were his, this, had he known of it, was so sincere, so earnest, so sympathetic, he would have wished for none other—for this particular poem at least.

She read it with feeling, with intent expression, full of emotion, and Saul Weir, with elbows on the table, and chin resting in the palms of his hands, contemplating the flitting of that emotion across her face, became a study; magnificent as an athlete of the imperial days, superb of limb, an embodiment of health as it was designed to be by its Author; handsome-featured, clear on the brow, broad, white; eyes fixedly watching her, their truthful calm light settling all in that rapt gaze; and for a minute or two afterwards Saul Weir did not pass any comment; then he said thoughtfully, reflecting on it, "Yes, you are right; any poem of like nature with that, would lift one."

"Poems are sent for the sorrowful, I think; the glad can do with prose."

How thoughtful her remarks seemed to him! He was only used to the men and women of the world, and had not met with child-talk, in which so often both truth and wisdom lie deep and precious.

"True, Daisy; prose appeals to the mind, poetry to the heart——"

"And soul," she ventured timidly.

"Is there any name to the poem?" asked he.

"Only two letters, 'A. C.'"

"Another mounting the steep. God help him, or her, whoever it may be!"

Daisy looked up at that serious, respectful, sympathetic utterance—looked with curious interest at her friend, and thought him somehow so different to others whom she had come in contact with. It was the deeper side to his nature that impressed her most. But he could be entertaining, could amuse, could make the time pass all too swiftly, and entrancing while on its course, as she found when he brought pictures to the table and explained them with language not couched in polished phrases perhaps, but possessed of a hearty, genuine ring, that is, after all, the healthiest type of eloquence.

Then he arose, for it was half-past ten, and bade her a kind good-night; and in his room she went to sleep, dreaming of him, while he was still poring over his books, tracking a new vein of thought. Aspiration seemed stronger than ever, after communing with that bright, pure young spirit, striving like himself for learning and for goodness, and it kindled to still fairer promise all of which his life was proud.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SISTERS.

THOSE of the thronged pathway of Bridge Street, Blackfriars, who turned to look again at the pale slender girl hurrying to the terminus, were impressed by something more striking than the mere prepossessing face—something deeper than the simple amiability which no one would doubt for a moment. Cabmen spoke to her with their husky brusqueness subdued to quite a respectful civility; the *gamins*, eager to carry her bag, did not pester, after the gentle yet firm refusal; flower-girls, slender also and terribly thin, looked wistfully after her, and breathed for a moment a higher atmosphere; the surly policeman at the corner softened, thinking of a daughter somewhere away, and even moved himself to wave back a cab about to run over her; an old apple-woman on the opposite curb hunted over her basket for the rosiest, which she held temptingly; the omnibus conductors did not hurl the routes at her as though to knock her over; the outside porters politely asked if she had any luggage about; and altogether Miss Sylvester was making very fair progress, and ultimately stood with the crowd to take her ticket, after the comfortable English fashion, but looking pitifully anxious and impatient, and so interesting withal, that many watched pleasantly and with sympathy, although they knew nothing of her story. Ada's heart was filled with uneasiness on her sister's account. At night her rest had been broken by disturbing fears; and she had hurried off without her breakfast, nourishment she ought on no account to have neglected. Thus, by the

time of her arrival at Ramsgate she felt both anxiety and faintness. Without the loss of a minute, however, she walked quickly in the direction of Harbour Road; and her heart sank while she drew near, for she saw workmen busy at the front. Sound of their hammers rang down the quiet road; chips and shavings were borne by the wind towards her. She could scarcely summon composure enough to walk up the steps and ask for the child. Trembling, she stood by the doorway of the front room, then looked up with some surprise. Leaning an elbow on the mantelpiece, while he examined a plan, was a man, who instantly caught Ada's attention. There was something in his appearance so real and genuine—and Ada liked that. The hand was firm, the look of thought almost intellectual; the contour of the head was noble, the expression of the face very striking, especially when he looked quickly up and noticed her standing in the doorway. Then he laid down the plan, and with quiet respect walked towards her, saying, "Miss Sylvester, I perceive, by the resemblance to your sister. Do not fear" (for he noticed her agitation); "she is well, and in good hands."

The words calmed her. She felt at rest upon the point instantly, so reassuring was his kind and feeling voice. There was no straining to make the most of an occasion about Saul Weir. He quietly added that Miss Daisy was staying with Mrs Clough, writing that person's address, leaving it to Miss Daisy to explain his share in it, and then turned to give some directions to a lad standing by waiting his orders. Miss Sylvester thanked him, and looked Mr Saul Weir in the face. She had never looked any one in the face like it before, but somehow did not mind this tender and thoughtful-eyed one, —his eyes were so different to any one else's. He became of a deeper red on his dazzling cheek, and bowed with a grace that caused her to wonder exceedingly. He gently explained the road she should follow; and she departed, after again expressing her thanks. Mechanically taking up a plane, musing, he inquired of himself, "I wonder if there is anything about me, or about the trade of a carpenter and joiner, stimulative to criticism? Miss Ada looked almost as wonderingly, as grate-

fully, at me. Now I hope she won't go and carry off my young friend, for I'm not at all inclined to part with her."

All the remainder of the afternoon Saul Weir thought deeply. The incident seemed to indicate how easily one may attach the heart-strings—how quickly they may be broken. Not a week since the child was unknown, and to-day he would feel a darkness and realise a loss if, upon his return home, he found Daisy gone. Yet, from his knowledge of her, he scarcely expected it. She would, at least, remain to say good-bye. But Ada might have to catch a return train—might exercise her natural and proper guardianship,—then, with the bare acknowledgment of some brief note of thanks for his kindness to her sister, would leave with the abruptness not unusual in the world. And Saul Weir sighed, the happy time passed with Daisy flashing back upon his recollection, with their innocent designs for the future. His desire to know the result of Ada's visit did not relax in the least his scrupulous attention to the work; but when the time came he walked quickly over the ground, and hurried upstairs, four steps at once. The rooms were vacant, and a coldness stole upon him—no defined feeling beyond the coldness: he was naturally warm-hearted, and the sensation displeased him. He went down-stairs again, one step at a time, and sought out Mrs Clough, from whom he learnt that they had really gone—indeed had remained but a very short time after the calling of the young lady. He thanked her, then went up to his poor little rooms again, sitting down and looking round, and shivering slightly. He went into the bedroom, walking with unusual softness even for him. This thing was new. He stood on the threshold of pain. It had wounded him. He took the old Bible—the mother's—and knelt with it by the bed, with lowered face, lips kissing the marks by the dear dead hand. There many minutes, and the page was moist. Then he felt a small arm steal around his neck—felt himself kissed. Thrilled, he looked up into the prettiest and most loving face that ever beamed upon the kneeling. "You thought me gone," she whispered; "we were only walking by the sea until you came in. I had so much to tell

Ada! She agrees with all our plans, and thinks it so good of you. She is waiting to thank you herself. How happy we shall be!" Why, it was not the same man. He stood magnificently glad, lifting her to a light and joyous spring, and stooping to kiss her for the pleasant news, wondering, then, how he could have believed it of her.

The slight wound thus exquisitely healed, sunshine beamed again.

That very feeling constituted the resplendent worth of his character.

With all the grand childlike simplicity of nature, there were, as yet, unfathomed depths in his sensitive heart.

Guileless as the dawn, strong as the Roman athlete, tender as a tremulous boy, tuned and strung lovingly.

Kind deeds live ages in such memories. He would never forget this forethought.

Saul Weir had been surprised into emotion; but there was the latent force of a wonderful repose—that supreme consciousness of might and majesty which imparts poetry to the languid movement of the lion.

Fearlessly he struck out his path, persistently he has followed it, with a bold and chastened courage the best witness of his force of character. And this dainty dream of afterwork? Who shall dare say the worker may not dream? Nay, but do not the dreams full often gild the common toil, and make of bread-winning a sweeter task than life yields to lords?

They went to Ada in the sitting-room; and Saul Weir made closer acquaintance with that pleasing and genuine character; yet, with all its amiability and quiet sincerity, a less lofty nature than was that of the younger sister.

"I have to thank you, Mr Weir," said Ada, with perfect self-possession, "for your very great kindness to my sister. You were truly a friend when she had no friend. Only as one to whom Daisy is more dear than anything on earth can I thank you; but that gratitude, believe me, is very deep." Her tremulous voice proceeded from emotion, not confusion. She felt as willing to trust this man, as the unprotected love to

trust the brave and good; and she felt instinctively that her dear little Daisy would be as safe with him, and as tenderly cared for, as though with herself. Thus her gratitude for what he had done, her contentment with what he proposed to do, was deep.

"I am glad to hear you approve of our plans, Miss Sylvester. I shall be pleased to watch over your treasure for you, and you need not fear but that my watch will be a faithful one. We shall mutually benefit, I have no doubt; there are branches of learning known to me with which Daisy has not yet made acquaintance, while she possesses a method of communicating a finer and more delicate type of reading, which I have already found helpful, since it has directed my thoughts into new channels."

"Daisy always gave promise of the love for reading, and her observation is quicker than I have found usual with girls of her age. Our dear parents bequeathed us this one, this only legacy." But Ada knew nothing of that more exquisite side to it which had so taken Saul Weir's admiration. When a child quits loving guardianship for the Siberia known as school, it becomes practically dead to those whose deepest joy has been in studying the tender gradation of sensibility, the awakening of emotion, the dawn time of idealism; possession is still held, but it is a title of courtesy. The case of bones still belongs to the original owner, but they have no life for such again. The living soul, with its wealth of varying development and expansion, has for ever gone. The frozen, cramped, precise spirit, returning in the place of that ingenuous, innocent one banished, trails its galling chains and scarce lifts the cowered head whereon freedom and youth shone like a glory. Ada had a mere stranger's remembrance of her inclination knowledge-wards, had a mere stranger's remembrance of her intensely loving disposition and traits of unusual sweetness, and that was all. Of the man and the woman, the man knew most of this child, inconsistent though the assertion may appear.

Now the plan thought of by these clever people, without asking advice of the many profound advisers about, and with-

out consulting even those experienced ones, the Misses Clough, took this simple form, by which, if Ramsgate would be the loser, Saul Weir and his visitor would be the gainer. For the improvement of his worldly circumstances, and the aiding of his educational designs, Saul Weir had for some time contemplated removing to London or its outskirts, there to begin business on his own account. He was the last man in the world to remain stationary, or to stand all his life in the shoes of a journeyman. His was a progressive character; it was for pushing forward while it was groping its way upward. This decided upon, he would not be long putting it into execution. Here the lines cross; Daisy would accompany him, would go to some good day-school, would study with him after his work in the happy and peaceful evenings; he would have a house of his own, and a housekeeper to look after it; Daisy would keep pets, and be very much of a pet herself; Ada would come and see them often, and feel happier and more contented concerning Daisy than she had ever felt in her life; the business would prosper if but for the higher impetus given by the home-like charm; the learning would surpass anything either of them had been able as yet to accomplish. This was the roseate line of picturing put glowingly before the kind, solicitous, unworldly sister, who ought, of course, to have denounced it as not quite the thing, instead of entering gratefully into the project and honestly believing it would tend to produce good. Something wanting here, then, evidently, in this character; admirable as nursery governess, but lacking in the capacity of elder sister!

CHAPTER XIX.

"SHOULD I FIND MY SON, HE SHALL HEAR OF YOU."

WHEN the tall, long-coated, professional-looking individual who had been ushered into the presence of the unconscious Noeba Edred, found himself free from the observation of the landlady, he, without loss of a moment, satisfied himself that the mysterious woman was really insensible, and next looked round for the wooden case. Having found this without any difficulty he drew it towards him and examined it closely. It was not to be opened, that was certain; too good a workman had been engaged on the making for that; neither was it, without attracting notice, to be removed. This was not the object. It was rightly conceived that the careful casing was for the purpose of a voyage, and more ready facility would thus be afforded for obtaining possession. Its description was now known, and the confederate returned to Jediah Lufkin, who was impatiently awaiting him in the parlour. "Well," asked the latter abruptly, "what success?"

"It's too big to smuggle. Old woman has gone off: if you like to step up and take its measurement."

"I think I will. Guess it ain't too bulky for my carriage."

They went up cautiously, unseen by the woman serving in the bar. Jediah Lufkin quickly pushed the door open and stepped in, to find himself confronted by the owner of the case, out of bed, sitting on the coveted object, with the most Satanic grin her weird features had ever displayed. Her hand was on the bell-rope; she was sitting below a window she could open and scream out of, if they advanced; the ghastly

frill round her face was shaken by her inward laughter, her skinny hands clutched, talon-like; her fierce eyes burnt with ferocity; her teeth closed with a strength and defiance significant of tremendous spirit and endurance: the intruders had met their match.

"Let the old death's-head alone, we'll trap her further on," whispered his companion to Jediah Lufkin. He paused, swiftly took in the situation, and with a hard scowl commenced to turn up his coat-sleeves.

Then Noeba Edred pulled the bell with violence.

The Mormon retreated a step; the landlady came running up instantly, followed by her son; her lodger stood erect, with a hand outstretched and an expression of countenance the woman had never before seen.

"Send for Saul Weir, the carpenter!" she cried.

"Certainly," said the landlady, at once despatching her son; then her singular lodger, in a tone of command, enjoined, "Stay with me until he comes."

"But there's nobody in the bar; I can't leave," remonstrated the poor woman.

"I will pay you three times what you will lose by it!"

"By sales, perhaps, ma'am, but not by larks. Get some o' them young chaps in all to themselves, they'll make quick work of emptying the barrels!"

During this colloquy the respectable-looking professional man and his companion withdrew, and quitted the inn. The old dame was one too many for them, thus far. The landlady made things safe and satisfactory by running down-stairs every now and then to mark if the public entertained itself too liberally. She was not inconvenienced for long. Mr Weir returned with the messenger. "Well, friend, what is the matter?" he asked anxiously, in some alarm at the excitable appearance presented.

"There is no safety for me in this town now, Saul Weir. You promised me, when you removed to London you would see me as far as Liverpool, and on board. Will you do so, and when? I go in search of Hugh Edred, since he will not come to me."

"You must do nothing of the kind. Such travelling about would be your death."

"Nay, Saul Weir, I bear a charmed life. When my son is found I die—not before. I shall be safer on the ocean, on the distant continent, than I shall now be in this land. I beat back peril now; it will not always be. Look you," stretching forth her skinny hand and arm, touching him solemnly on the shoulder, "I hold a secret many would destroy me for. I grow older and more feeble; this strength is artificial, mere excitement; the constant vigilance wears me; one of these days I shall get the worst of it, and such must not be. Will you go with me so far as Liverpool and see the poor old woman off; will you, Saul Weir, or no?"

"If you are determined to go, notwithstanding my persuasion to the contrary—determined to go whether I accompany you or not, however much sorrow I may feel, I cannot refuse to go with you."

"No? Thank you; that is very good—more like you."

"It is more like me to try to shelter you from hardship than to countenance it; but as you will. And now you want to know how soon I can clear up here? A week will do it—I am then at your service; and meantime, you shall not be left alone."

"No?" she asked, intently; "by day nor night? I'll get some sleep then; I need that more than anything. Times have been anxious, or else full of pain, so I haven't had much of late."

Saul Weir knew of a worthy person who would watch beside his friend, and sent for her. She was a long time in coming, and the strangely-contrasted ones talked of the approaching voyage, respecting which Weir did not conceal his apprehensions, which had no effect whatever upon Noeba Edred, whose obstinacy was of the pugnacious order, and entirely deaf to remonstrance.

The woman came. Mrs Edred was provided with companionship. Mr Weir departed again, kind, patient, solicitous as ever, and next day went to London. He went by an early train, and arrived before many of the shops were swept out—

a dilatory process that made him wish to be behind some of the young gentlemen engaged at it. By ten o'clock he had found a place he liked, by twelve o'clock he had made up his mind to have it, by two o'clock he had settled everything, by four o'clock he was back in Ramsgate, at six o'clock he was at his books with his pupil.

Saul Weir behaved in no shabby manner to the employer he had worked for. He had prepared him for this taking a business of his own as far back as the spring of that year. The master sorrowed much to lose this worthy fellow, and not from selfish motives alone. He respected his honesty, which far outshone his own, and held that Saul Weir was a man to work as industriously behind your back as before your face. In an age of eye-service this commands admiration, especially of those who have not been over-particular themselves. True to the week, Saul Weir and his belongings journeyed from the Kentish coast to London, there proceeding straight to Essex Road, Islington, where the new householder would henceforth lock a front door of his own. A highly respectable servant-housekeeper had been procured, and in her care Mr Weir left his pupil, busy at arranging the books and other departments coming more within her province than in that of the servant-housekeeper. Then he and his odd companion set off to Liverpool.

The huge port impressed the observant mechanic as London had never impressed him. Its multitude of curious shops passed in the lesser thoroughfares, its cosmopolitan people, its colossal transport of merchandise, its pressure of business, its mechanical appliances, in which he experienced deep interest, all left an impression he would not readily forget.

He was much taken by the old book-stores; especially one of unusual extent he determined to return to after seeing his friend off. He did not write down the name, but repeated it to himself—a way he had. "Treat memory with confidence, it will prove a good servant," he used to say; "but so sure as you grow suspicious with it, it will play you false." So he would repeat the name of a man or the name of a street, or whatever he wished to remember, repeat with stern concentrating thought

as though daring it to flee, and the thing remained as branded a recollection as some crime of one's own, or some virtue of somebody else's. He now repeated slowly—"Francis Grattan,—Francis Grattan,—Francis Grattan," and left it, to be thought no more of until wanted.

Noeba Edred was not in the least disconcerted by the hurry and confusion on all hands, or the rude jostling met with hither and thither. She made for the docks with unflagging resolution, unalterable in her purpose, although Saul Weir hoped she would waver on coming to the spot. On the contrary, sight of the vessels at anchor fired her enthusiasm anew, and until on board she would feel painful impatience. It moved Saul Weir to see the intensity of her anxiety concerning the precious case, and he really began to experience some curiosity as to the nature of its contents. However, as she did not confide this, he asked no questions, and contented himself up to the last moment with behaving towards her with as devoted attention as any son would have bestowed.

She knew this, and in the solemn last few minutes before their parting she said to him: "I have never thanked you, Saul Weir, for all as I ought to have done. You have thought me gruff and uncouth and ungrateful, but I now thank you from my very soul, and may the Lord reward you! Should I find my son, he shall hear of you."

CHAPTER XX.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FRANCIS GRATTAN, SECOND-HAND BOOKSELLER.

WHEN the shops of great cities are all closed, and the noxious clouds of gaseous smoke are scattered, hovering angels, looking down upon deserted pathways and silent streets, and into marts of commerce from which the buyers and sellers have gone, see many a curious site of feverish traffic, many a wild and weird picture framed in by walls; which men, who have no time to see or think, hurry into and out of or past, while day, with its swift short breath of fleeting hours, blends them in with others, none noticing the something strange and grim which angels see. And these discover many an interior whose walls are pages of a diary of singular experience; for houses are but volumes; the rooms are chapters, that may be read lightly, but may also tell deep truths. At night all is bared, and those tiers of hearts' histories called houses, stand like monuments sculpt with hieroglyphs of the kings and queens of endurance and resignation reigning in human breasts. There are shops the angels see into, sumptuous as drawing-rooms, the green carpet, plate-glass, gilding, lace-curtains, and painted ceilings, show to disadvantage with the gas out, but the angels see the outline of luxury, and discover the traces of wealth; and there are others of less pretension and more business, no carpet, and boards well worn, the appointments the well-assorted stock, everywhere signs of the busy rush of the daily trade. And yet others left in haste, all is in disorder; the night's business was carried far on towards midnight, and the wearied folk have hurried to their beds.

There is a stirring censor here named competition, and a rigorous centurion called poverty, and the two of them grind down the profit and lengthen out the labour till the issue is barely worth the effort. And there are nondescript, irregular, indescribable places that puzzle even the angels, and into which they don't pause looking long. Some of the old book-stores class with this division; and among such, that of Francis Grattan, of Liverpool, deserves honourable mention, for it is the dustiest and most disorderly collection of papyrus, parchment, or paper, from which angels ever fled aghast.

A Liverpool book-store has a world-wide connection, but it scarcely seems that one world is sufficient to patronise the odd old tomes huddled and heaped at Francis Grattan's. Whether produced upon this planet would appear almost doubtful, so unlike to our shapely, comely, dainty literature, is this huge mass of unsightly volumes. A ship's freightage of books spread out either side of the doorway, and round the corner: a long, dark, low-ceilinged shop, paved, walled, pillared, stacked, piled, strewn, shelved, and hung with the outcast and Ishmaelite, the forgotten and unknown, the seldom heard of, and the never heard of; the suppressed and the prohibited, the dead and the dying, of composed and compiled creations with Title at the head and Finis at the tail; a staircase lined with grim old medical works—their owner had dived into some of them when out of sorts, and passing them going up to bed of a night had turned his face away with a shudder; the landing above so packed with massive volumes it seemed as though the weight of their accumulated bulk would crash through the old supports; every chamber dusky with books, close, lowering, oppressive. Francis Grattan had, in his day, attended sales all over England, Ireland, and Scotland, buying often for the love of buying, for the greedy mania to possess: no bibliomaniac was ever more devoutly fond of his purchases. Thus the collection had gone on increasing until it had overrun the entire place, even down to the cellars, where it made his heart bleed to see the mildew and mould, and beetles comfortably setting up a colony in this city of perished thought.

Francis Grattan himself stands out very clear in relief from his serried mass of books. A skeleton figure, tall originally, now stooping, with bony angular knees which have a weak method of jerkily going together, one against the other, irritatingly, unaccountably, unless one accounts for it through a manner he has of putting them together to form a rest for big open volumes, while his outstretched feet are tiptoe to raise the said rest nearer his ruined eyesight. But his eyes are piercing still to look at a man who has a book to sell; and if it happens to be a book Francis Grattan wants, to look his man through and through. The face wherein these keen eyes are so deeply set and to such purpose, is a singularly cut face, for it seems to be formed upon lines of wisdom of whole ages; as it indeed has been formed, thoughtfully rigid; time, learning, and care having first carved a contemplative and reflective outline, and filled this in with deeply-graven indication of an austere pensiveness: a face once looked at, never forgotten. Memory of it has accompanied travellers and remained vivid as at first, though not only individuals but nations have intervened. The book, bought of him to satisfy a vein of study, gratify a whim, or beguile an idle hour, might be lost or treasured as the case would be; but if lost, the old book-store and the face associated would not escape with the purchase. Recollection refused to part with it, and the Grattan profile became one of those persistent and perpetual realisms, not exactly troublesome, yet haunting one. Allied with this piece of vivid imagery, people carried away remembrance of the Grattan voice, with which they had been much struck, and, if of nervous susceptibilities, unpleasantly impressed; it had a soft hollow depth, as though the words were gently dragged up from a catacomb of dead speech; the adjectives were muffled, sentences taking long to disinter; this man emphatically thought before he spoke, not afterwards; there was a shadowy gloom somewhere beyond the arch of his mouth and talk became saddened and darkened thereby, and was but just surviving when it reached the person addressed. It was as though Roger Bacon spoke through this congenial mouthpiece, the calm and wise periods of the old

philosopher losing nought by the mild, low tones. Men might come and men might go, business might be brisk or stand stock-still, books be born and die daily, and contemporary keepers of old book-stores pass from among students to be known of them no more; but Francis Grattan's voice was never raised above that deliberate, scholarly, dreamy undertone; and it seemed to sink into one's soul, and was thought of long afterwards with the face, those pensive lines and subdued tones going in harmony.

Although Francis Grattan was in all probability the most famous old bookseller in the kingdom, and had in his day done the largest trade of its kind extant, still he had not made profits in proportion, nor put by any considerable amount of savings. If dry and wizened in appearance, his heart was large and generous; the store was not opened for miserly purposes; and if a poor student wanted a book much but wanted a meal more, Francis Grattan would give him the book and a valuable word or two with it that made the gift of higher value. It needed but for those keen eyes to discover sincere and ardent love for an old work, and to note that true humility, which is the basis of the finest learning, when the scholar is eager to sit as the disciple, for Grattan to experience sympathy and tender some ready help. And as years fled onward and the man aged, becoming cadaverous and shaggy and unprepossessing, the heart, so far from changing also, preserved its generous freshness and was splendid with its old devotion.

And there was a tenderness few suspected. Witness the positive emotion on parting with some more than usually prized volume, yet which, because of the enormous stock around him, he did not feel justified in losing the sale of. How he seemed to hold on to it, yet with so soft and fond a grasp, reluctant to transfer it to the colder hand, and how the books closing up or tumbling into its place did not fill the vacancy for years. His retentive memory almost astonished himself; it was a prodigious catalogue, a reference guide to the literatures from the very beginning, from Caxton onwards. Men of genius, of rare attainments, of ripe scholarship, visit

Francis Grattan's store for the opportunity of enjoying a talk. He has one of the master-minds of the time, although the coat is worn threadbare, nay, patched at the elbow, an we mistake not. He is modest while communicative of his research, not displaying it; rather discoursing as to woo wisdom than to dazzle it. Neither does he grumble nor devote an hour afterwards to speculating on human meanness, should the visitor, after the long chat, leave without becoming a purchaser; on the contrary, Grattan thanked God that he hadn't, for he loved his collection too well; ay, every individual member thereof to its most ragged!

Seven years before the period of this record there came to Liverpool—no one knew from where, nor did any one care—a woman of some interest, so far as personal appearance and manners went. Occupying apartments close to the old book-store, she frequently passed, sometimes looking at a book or two. Grattan, in the far recesses of his den of letters, saw a person of medium height, dressed in dark colours, with neatness and attention to detail, though apparently of moderate means. She was evidently not very well off, since she only bought the cheapest copy she could find of the particular work she required, rarely, indeed, spending eighteenpence; her kid gloves, as he noticed when she handed him the money, were much mended, but her collar and cuffs were scrupulously clean, and there was a general regard shown for appearing as decently dressed as circumstances would allow. Seeing her every now and then, Mr Grattan came to learn the face, with its intent cast, and that expression of consideration which fixed scrutiny and knit brows impart, and it gave him an idea of belonging to a person of thought; but there were so many persons of thought about, she attracted no undivided attention. He could see that this person's eyes were given to reading; that her brow, as outlined by bands of iron-grey hair, was that of a person of intellect; that her gift, as conveyed by the words they had interchanged together, was that of a quick intelligence: further than this he knew nothing; and they knew little more at the house where she had taken up her abode, the little amounting to this—she

paid regularly, of chief importance; she copied, or translated, or composed,—something in the writing way which they had little interest in; her name was Mrs Steele: they didn't like her name—it conveyed an idea of theft to their mind; but they got used to it, and after a time gave up watching her when she went out. She was now and then visited by a man, whether Mr Steele or no, they were not informed, but were quite of opinion that he was an unpleasant-looking and unpleasant-mannered individual. Here their data concerning the woman of interest came to a full stop, and her landlady knew as well as other people that one can't know everything.

One very wet day, when callers were few and business slack, the occasional lady-customer looked in at the store: the books had all been taken inside because of the rain. She told Mr Grattan she would not detain him very long, and would he kindly tell her if he had an old work descriptive of the South Sea Bubble? She was copying some manuscript having that notorious scheme for its subject, and wished to refer to contemporaries of Sir John Blunt, the stock-jobbing lawyer, its chairman; and Mr Knight, the cashier, who absconded with £100,000. Yes; Mr Grattan had more than one old work of the kind, and would be happy to oblige her. He handed her the volumes, after digging and delving to a great depth, and he favoured her with a quiet opinion upon Blunt and Knight and the South Sea Scheme thrown in. It was not a caustic or spiteful criticism, passed from a safe distance, after a decent lapse of time, rather a grave and sad lament for the thousands ruined by it. She was quite in sympathy with this sentiment; her voice was tremulous; she falteringly confided one of the shadows of her own history; *her* fortune had been ruined by unprincipled jobbery and speculation; she had moved in a different sphere at one time; alas! we never know the trials in store for us,—and so on, turning over the covers and leaves with an abstracted air; yet, when he stooped to pick up a work or turned to place one on a shelf, searching with the eye of a hawk: so she purchased one of the books and departed. After that, when passing, she bowed.

Mr Grattan thought her manner agreeable, and he sincerely sympathised with her misfortunes. In seven years one may become fully acquainted, if casual recognition is to develop at all into acquaintance. Mr Grattan asked her one day if she knew of a quiet-mannered, industrious person (one fond of reading preferred) likely to suit him as housekeeper. He did not ask this supposing she would offer her own services, but she did do so, and he accepted them without any hesitation. And the new housekeeper had been waiting for this for seven years.

The only person put out by this arrangement was Agnes Sedgwick, Mr Grattan's granddaughter, who, from a very early age, had lived with him, having very much her own way. This young lady did not take to the new housekeeper. Although but fourteen years old, she could see farther into character than did Francis Grattan, who was so preoccupied and abstracted he had no time for surmises and prejudices. Miss Sedgwick, who cultivated a manner of speaking her mind with candour, without much regard for feeling, told both her grandfather and the housekeeper that she did not like her, and never would. The grandfather did not attach any great importance to it; he was used to this young lady's vagaries and humoured her so far as to pass them over without chiding; indeed he could not do this, he loved her! The housekeeper attached, however, very great importance to it, and scored a black mark against her name, but was outwardly amiable and matronly, treating it with playful regret, and expressing a hope that they might not be such very bad friends after all. "I don't think we shall ever be good ones," said Miss Sedgwick, simply: and that part ended there.

The first day of the housekeeper entering, when she saw this girl engaged at needlework did not look up upon her entrance nor change so much as a shade, she said to herself, "A chit; I didn't bargain for this, but I'll teach her submission very quickly!" It was a dark-browed, reflective-looking face bending over the work. Mrs Steele did not like dark-browed people: there might be something fine about those eyes under the long dark lashes; long-lashed people

always had fine eyes; but some eyes made Mrs Steele feel uncomfortable. Francis Grattan's eyes would have done so, but for the fact of their piercing scrutiny always being subdued by the dreaminess of thought. When the girl did look up, without curiosity, but with aggressive disdain, she found there was a great deal in those eyes, they betrayed an impassioned, uncommon nature, and a will that might neither be bent nor broken. Mrs Steele, a quick reader of the soul's manuscript, saw that in a moment; and they were the eyes of Francis Grattan, the same piercing scrutiny, without the dreaminess of thought. And she feared that submission process might not be quite so easy after all. The girl was evidently tall for her age, strong, consequently obstinate (thought the housekeeper), fresh of colour, pretty (consequently vain, and vain female juveniles she considered awkward objects to deal with), warm-blooded, clear-headed, and with the muscle of an embryo Amazon. She was right in every particular but one; Miss Sedgwick was not vain. As regards her strength, if Mrs Steele or any other person annoyed her, purposely and vindictively, she would expel the offender by main force, and make no trouble of it.

This is the antagonistic side of the girl's nature. To her grandfather a totally different aspect was presented — one so pliant, so sympathetic, so lovable, she scarcely seemed the same being. Of this dual disposition came a character singular with unconventional qualities—the passionate throbbing impulse of some splendid gipsy youth; the staid fortitude here and there witnessed in childhood, where, right or wrong, the motto is "No surrender;" the intensity of affection possessed by such natures; and that depth of solicitude which is without any rival.

These three persons, a serving-maid, and a tabby cat, constituted the establishment of Francis Grattan, second-hand bookseller. An apology is due to the cat for late mention, considering that he was foremost in activity, and through good and ill report worthy of his race. A large handsome creature, broad-headed, big-eyed, striped as though imported from the jungle, fierce to foes, gracious to friends, and loving the old

man as fondly as did Agnes herself. Francis Grattan was very attached to this faithful companion, and after closing each evening its place was upon his knee, some volume in his hand, his granddaughter seated near. The cat was styled Nimrod, on account of his being a mighty hunter; and Nimrod held slight respect for literature when a mouse was in prospect. Over the shelves and up the books was all one, and Nimrod's trail was hither and thither over the backs of the Fathers, the grave old philosophers, the solemnly expounded tenets of those who abhorred such animals in the days of the witch excitement, and up to the very cornices, where, behind mighty tomes, were some of his choicest preserves. Many a pitched battle had been seen in the little room at the rear between Nimrod and Miss Sedgwick, neither of whom were ever disposed to yield. An embrace resembling the grip of a vice was the young lady's method of displaying endearment towards the mighty hunter, and this he resented, with much growling and curvature of spine, such manifestations of anger proving exasperating to the tormentor, who pursued her bear-like hugging until Nimrod, thoroughly incensed, sprang from her and up the books, and was seen no more for some time.

Mrs Steele had been in the service of Francis Grattan about three months, when one evening she was called upon by that male individual who had been wont to excite the curiosity of her late landlady. Mr Grattan had been away all day at a sale near Manchester, and would not return until the last train arrived; the assistant who came and went daily had closed the shop and departed; Miss Sedgwick was reading some work picked from the store (she took literature very much as it came, without much regard to its worth or its origin), when she was considerably astonished to see a shabby-looking thickly-bearded stranger walk in, without ceremony, and with abundance of blustering noise. He was tall, brawny, coarse-handed, and gruff-voiced, and the girl quailed an instant, but only an instant.

"I wants to see your housekeeper, a woman passing by name o' Steele!" and he seated himself with a stolid defiant

sullenness. Two could play at that game, and Miss Sedgwick answered—

"Then I think your better course will be to go to the front door, ring the bell, and wait while the servant takes your message up."

"I'll have you to know, young woman, that I'm not given to waiting!"

"I'm afraid you'll have to begin, then, for you'll sit there a long time before I take your message."

"Do you mind having in the gal, then?" he asked, in a more civil tone.

"If you mean our servant, I can ring for her." And she did so, with anything but a pleasant look across at the curious visitor.

"Don't you run away with the idea I wasn't expected," he explained, with bluff familiarity; "she telegraphed me this morning the old man would be out," jerking with his thumb upward; "and she'd better make short work of seeing me, or I'll know the reason why."

Agnes was considerably astonished, and the feeling of surprise was not lessened by the appearance of the housekeeper, with a face so ghastly and convulsed that she approached nearer the presentment of rage or terror than anything Miss Sedgwick had witnessed in her life. In this, however, she was mistaken, neither rage nor terror disturbed the cool person standing in the doorway, or her words belied her feelings, for she addressed the man imperiously, and in a tone of command bade him follow her to the street where they might talk with more freedom.

"You are late, Eli Jebeson; I have been waiting, as you say, expecting you, and as usual, you are not punctual; now come out of doors, where you can make all the noise you like!"

The man arose, heavily, scowling, and with a swaggering blustering gait, followed the woman, without addressing the young lady again. Altogether this Eli Jebeson seemed a singularly unpleasant person, and Miss Sedgwick's very prejudiced opinion of Mrs Steele was rendered still more unfavourable. The housekeeper was absent beyond an hour, but she arrived

at home before the old bookseller, and going in to the young lady, addressed her with some earnestness as follows: "The person that called here, Miss Sedgwick, is employed by a London house as a messenger, and upon expeditions where strength rather than delicacy is required. His boorish manners, although unpleasant, are not meant to be insulting; he has lived much in the rougher portions of the United States where civilization is at a discount. My poor husband's affairs were involved in dreadful confusion at the time of his demise, and this man, Jebeson, who knew him in America, has been helping, with others of more weight and influence, to set things right. I am expecting——"

Miss Sedgwick interrupted the speaker with an abruptness worthy of Mr Eli Jebeson himself: "You need not take the trouble to enlighten me upon all this, Mrs Steele, for I don't take the slightest interest in it, and it won't prevent my mentioning the man's calling when grandpa comes in, if that is your idea." It was the idea, and the housekeeper waxed frostily indifferent, and with a cold repelling manner replied—

"Of course not, very proper of you. Next time Eli Jebeson calls Mr Grattan may be at home; although no scholar, Eli Jebeson is well educated, and entertains a profound respect for old books, so that he and your grandpa would not fall out, by any means!" Agnes could not account for it, but while the woman was speaking she felt chilled and uneasy.

Mr Grattan came home, dreadfully tired, as usual, after his day of purchase, and equally as usual, all of a fever lest he had over-bought. At the time, excitement and zest derived of the mania kept him up with artificial strength, which physically he sadly lacked, then with the reaction came the fear that he had expended more upon the lots than he was justified in doing, his stock was already so large, buyers were not so numerous as of yore for valuable editions, he was ageing every day. Every journey told him this; the miles that used to be a pleasure to travel were now irksome and performed with an effort: and there was Agnes, his beloved grandchild, whom he would rather provide for, than hazard

money upon increasing the thousands of volumes in which so much had already been sunk.

Dusty and fatigued and faint, wearied and low, then hers were the hands to quickly and lightly take his old hat and coat, to procure water for bathing the tired brow, to kneel and unlace his boots, draw them off carefully, and put on the slippers of her own working; hers were the hands to make the tea just as he liked it, to cut him bread and butter, and lay thin ham between to coax the appetite, uniformly bad; she opened the paper or journal at the advertisements or reviews of books, and then went to hunt for Nimrod to come and greet his master, because it gave him pleasure, and pleasure routed the hard and worn expression, and awoke the smile she loved to see.

In spite of her threat, Agnes did not trouble him with any mention of the odd occurrence, just left it to take care of itself, but she would not inform the housekeeper of her reserve.

Weeks passed, and the next event of moment was more stimulating to curiosity. Once or twice Agnes fancied she heard a footstep outside her door in the dead of the night; it merely paused there a moment, and then went on. It was a light, yet firm footstep, and belonged, she did not doubt, to the housekeeper, engaged in some nocturnal business; and this aroused the girl's inquisitiveness to such a pitch, she could scarcely go to sleep for thinking of it. She heard it again and again, whenever awake in fact; but as these wakeful times were scattered it was uncertain whether the occurrence was of nightly regularity. Miss Sedgwick by no means relished turning out of bed to see what it meant, yet at last she made a venturous resolve, and determined even fear should fail to shake her resolution. That the woman should be walking about at that hour of the night was quite excuse enough for discovering why.

Accordingly, the next time she heard the mysterious sound, Agnes hastily clothed herself about with her waterproof mantle which was hanging on the door, and lightly quitted the chamber. Outside, as everywhere else, books rose piled up to the highest level consistent with bare safety: the moonlight

through the window on the landing shone on the backs of these, and to the girl's quick fancy there seemed woven a faintly-coloured tapestry, whereon the old struggle betwixt good and ill was depicted with pale transparency. It was more gloomy on the stairs: she paused, listened with painful intensity; there was no sound to be heard; for an instant she felt inclined to return to her chamber, it all at once occurring to her that she had no more occasion to be stealing about at that hour than had the housekeeper, and if anything befell her it would serve her pretty well right. But hers was a nature rich in courageous obstinacy, and she went on, down-stairs, to the little sitting-room at the back of the shop; and here she was spell-bound to see the housekeeper in the shop; a small lantern not belonging to the house lighting her occupation, and revealing the singular picture of that absorbed woman, clad in a loose dressing-gown, long hair falling about her, eyes fixed, fierce and searching. For the moment Agnes believed she was looking upon the action of a somnambulist. This idea was speedily settled by seeing the woman toss book by book from her, with method, as she examined with close attention one after another, taking them in their order, so far as absence of all order or arrangement would admit of. And to the girl's surprise and wonder, the process applied to each book was precisely similar, hasty yet minute, glancing down the inside of the covers, over the fly-leaves and round the margins of the title-pages, on the edges with the books closed, and between the backs with the books open and held on a level with the lantern: the process, to say the least of it, being a peculiar one. Agnes was quick in forming conclusions, and she came to one: the woman was not searching for any printed contents—such are not usually on the edges, nor up the backs, nor, for anything she knew, on the margins; neither was the woman hunting between the pages or covers for letters or bank-notes; no, it was evidently something in the form of writing she was searching for—writing in the book, on the cover, or at the back, where, of course, it would but be placed for motives of concealment; and the girl was very puzzled.

The longer she watched through that little glass door, the more convinced was Agnes that this quest was no light or whimsical one. The concentrated vigilance and searching scrutiny displayed were not such as ordinary book investigation demands, even at midnight, for the study of some literary hobby. Suddenly there was a fall of some huge volumes at another part of the shop, and the noise scared the woman as much as it did Agnes; she paused at her work, and the girl saw her look half nervously over her shoulder in the direction of the disturbance. It was the mighty hunter mousing; and so the woman, bethinking herself, suspected. She resumed her examination, and finding no sign of any variation of her pursuit, Agnes returned to her chamber, remarking that if the woman passed many of her nights thus occupied she did not envy her the occupation. It was evidently a long search, for the girl lay awake far into the night and did not hear her pass upon returning to her bedroom. Then Agnes thought, "When ever can she sleep, for she is always down punctually at an early hour, and certainly does not show the effects of sitting up? It's curious, and I'll mention it to grandpa."

And she did so the next day; and Francis Grattan was not so deep in thought upon that occasion but it struck him also as curious, and there was something about it he did not quite like. It was not that injury was done to the stock, or that the stock was in any sense locked away, for it was exposed all over the place; but no matter the business, a man does think it queer for his servant to pay surreptitious visits to the immediate site of his trade in the dead of the night. Accordingly, Mr Grattan kept himself awake in his chamber, listening, while he read, for the footstep; but his ears were not so good as his granddaughter's, or he became over absorbed in his book, or possibly the cause of the anxiety had noticed the light under the door and put a veto on her expedition for that night.

She might have caught the alarm, for nothing was heard on the night which followed. Mr Grattan's loss of rest went against his health, however it might agree with the housekeeper, and the next night he went to bed earlier, falling into

a sound sleep instantly. From this he was with difficulty aroused by a cautious knocking at his door. It was Agnes, and judging the object, he arose, wearily and with aching head, quickly dressing himself, and joining the girl without. They proceeded to the sitting-room, where Francis Grattan saw for himself the scene described, and he at once entered the shop, his piercing eyes more inquiring even than the grave words, "What are you doing here, Mrs Steele?"

Nothing could be more undisturbed than the face of the lady as, looking up with a gratified smile, and that perfect serenity which comes not more of innocence than of learning, she explained, "I ought to have asked permission, but would not cause you apprehension on the score of sparks falling about; I am taking advantage of your superb collection to pursue the research, in which you have before now aided me. Domestic duties do not permit of my so doing in the day-time, nor do I think it principled to make use of time which, so long as one has a salaried engagement, belongs wholly to one's employer. At night, my time is my own; it is abstracted from slumber; there is no breach of principle, although a violation of the rules of health; it involves self-denial, but very early in life I was taught by stern necessity the virtue of restraint upon indulgence: I love my rest as much as most people, but I love these grand old books far more." She stretched her hands forth towards them with embracive and fond action. This and her words pleased him much. He felt sorrow and reproach, quickly as such natures do, and he replied to her with marked kindness.

"Pray make any use of the books you please, you are very welcome. You quite understand, I was a little mystified at first to find you so engaged at this hour, but I know well hours are not weighed by the enrapt seeker after wisdom. Pray take care of your health; I ruined mine by this very course. Good night, ma'am, good night."

The studious woman saw him go out of the shop, bent and careworn and kindly-looking; no expression of appreciation was upon her clever cast of feature, it was rather a cunning laugh of triumph. Unmoved she resumed her task with the books,

gripping them with a hand so cruel their master would have shivered for his favourites had he but known, and muttering to herself every now and then. These mutterings throw light upon the quest in which she was engaged: "Old Saul Weir, the miser, according to my authority, prized the old volume—old now, but contemporary with him, bearing imprint George the First—recording the origin, formation, rise and progress, and collapse of the extraordinary scheme; and somewhere in that book, wrote in cipher, a revelation more than two or three would walk from here to the other end of England to obtain. That book is about. I can nowhere discover trace of a descendant, but I know that book is about somewhere. Seven years ago I discovered amongst the books displayed in the front, one in which the name 'Saul Weir' was written; three years later I found another—why should not the particular one I am searching for be here also? Mr Grattan must have purchased a parcel of the old miser's belongings at some time, for his goods and chattels were all sold—there wasn't enough in the house to pay for the funeral. I like that, since Saul Weir was wealthier than the whole of the united money-grubbers of Christendom! Yes, I like that; there is something delightfully unique about it, more particularly as this colossal Treasure is patiently waiting for easy removal. Oh, it's a pretty lottery, and some of the clever ones will draw blanks, but not Sophia Steele! I don't think any one else is acquainted with the existence of this interesting old work, and I've been on the hunt ten years; but I have dropped into the right quarter at last, or I'm very much mistaken! It's certain, before this Treasure is found, the key to it must be secured. That key is contained in a cipher written in the old South Sea book. That book I will possess myself of, if I have to go housekeeping at every old book-store in Europe!"

CHAPTER XXI.

CHANGE IN FULL.

SAUL WEIR found his way back to the establishment of Francis Grattan, second-hand bookseller, without difficulty and without delay. He saw it some distance off—a low-pitched place, but spreading in length; and this carpenter, catching sight of it thus, settled with himself the alterations and improvements he would submit as possible, supposing he was upon friendly terms with its owner. Especially desirable did it appear to reduce the straggling upon either hand, and raise it. Which thoughts, as he drew near, led him to look upward, as men accustomed to work upon upper floors do, at times, when dwellings too near the ground offend their sense of correctness. Thus doing, he discerned a woman's face. It was near to the roof, flat to the glass, white to the brown old bricks. There was nothing uncommon about all this. It was the rigid cast of feature, fixedness of scrutiny, and motionless position, that caught his attention. All the time he was advancing, with hundreds of others upon foot, the woman did not move, and Saul Weir wondered what she was studying: not the chimney-pots—their house was not high enough for that; nor was it the fleecy clouds above nor shifting spectacle below. "She is lost in thought," he said to himself as he crossed. "I hope no anxiety or trouble is at the bottom of it." He paused below, and stood looking at the curious collection outside. People knocked against him, as though to remind him he was wasting his time. The interior looked shadowy. He liked that. The result of learning might stand in the full blaze of the sun-

shine, but the process, the preparation, should be veiled from the vulgar eye. He entered the temple. At a far end the owner, seated upon a three-legged stool, held a book open upon his knee, over which was bent his grave face, its absorbed thought more intent than usual,—upon his left shoulder that familiar, Nimrod the fierce hunter, gentle now that he rubbed his soft head against the scholar's cheek.

Saul Weir entered, walked half-way up the shop, and, finding that the old man took no notice of his presence, looked over the heap for himself. Mr Grattan was accustomed to people walking in out of curiosity, and had long given up addressing such; the idle time thus taken up could be so much more profitably employed. But if they had a query to put, or came up to pay for some work chosen from the mass, he was ever courteous and gentle, with the far-away dreamy voice, and the gaze, not yet aroused with the other members, from reverie of the past. Mr Weir looked about him, but could not see a volume of any use to him, profuse as was the choice; nevertheless, he possessed a fine feeling of repugnance, not always shared by his betters, to walking out of the place as coolly as he had walked in, without leaving a memorial of his visit. He coughed. Owing to its proximity to the water, the majority of people in Liverpool do cough at one time of the year or another Mr Grattan never heeded the cough. He once made a calculation how many volumes might be read in a life in the time taken up by attention to the public cough. Saul Weir thought the man was deaf, and, with a cheery honest action native to him, strode close, and brought his hand down upon his unoccupied shoulder.

Then Saul Weir was surprised by the quiet composure with which the reader placed a piece of paper at the page where interrupted and closed the book, and by the calm courteous manner of his address. After that, and the sweet far-away voice, he could no more have brought his hand down in similar fashion again than he could have flown.

"Your pleasure, sir?" inquired the old scholar, rising with dignity, which seemed to reprove the familiarity of the salute.

"I am sorry to have disturbed you, my pleasure being lightly satisfied, and at small cost."

"It would be well if all pleasure could be the same. Our age runs heavily on pleasure, and at great cost."

"Philosopher and scholar. I could find choice pleasure in your talk, and would profit. I am at the foot of the ladder; you look from the top step of it into eternity."

The remark was unlike the commonplace intercourse of the casual customer. The Grattan eyes began to focus in their deep sockets, the brows knitting to give clearer and more microscopic sight.

"You are a student?"

"I am learning my letters. God willing, I may become a student."

The modesty and humility of the reply pleased Francis Grattan.

"What is your station?"

"A lowly one. I work at the carpenter's bench."

"So did a greater, it is said, although I never believed it. And you weary of the plane and chisel?"

"Not at all; they are welcome to my hand as ever. But I have a mind, also."

"And that is a trouble to you?" asked with a kind yet sad smile.

"No; a joy. It averts discontent, sheds radiance even upon my occupation at the wooden bench. But it is without training, its thoughts without geometry; and my craft might as well be destitute of mechanics."

"Yet the trade would be feeble without the mortising-machine."

"Bearing the relation to handicraft which affectation of learning does to wisdom. But do not let me detain you longer than necessary. Have you a work treating on self-education, with guidance and directions, and, possibly, examples?"

"Don't think I have," murmured the bookseller, thoughtfully. "The great foible of to-day is instruction at the hands of others, whereby men and women allow others to think for

them. Reversing your order, they begin with deep works, and leave off at the letters. The people coming to me are, for the most part, more wise than the old friends yonder!" with an indescribable look of fondness and love in the direction of the dusky tomes lining the walls.

"Well, let me have something that will be of use to me." Mr Weir looked at his watch with some impatience, thinking of the long journey back to his pupil. The book-worm smiled slightly at the huge old-fashioned relic. Altogether, he thought this strong man possessed of a fine simplicity and ingenuousness that sat very well upon him; and he sympathised with the desire for knowledge

"What kind of work shall I look for? Are you poor?"

"Not in the least," replied Saul Weir, pleasantly. "I have but just taken a house, and have twenty-seven pounds."

"And will make it last you a long, long time." The voice might have been heard in dreams, it was so softly sad and echoless.

"I hope so," replied the young man, cheerfully, yet touched and made melancholy in spite of himself.

Mr Grattan faced another way abruptly, turned over old volumes, the average cost of each of which had exceeded twenty-seven pounds, and abstractedly, almost moodily, lifted one and another, contemplating them unthinkingly, and seeing, in grim, horrible fancy, all the far-stretching bulk of lettered wealth swept hence by ruthless hands.

Observing the mood, Mr Weir pursued his own search, and enjoyed his own reflections, and verily thought that he could pass a life in such august and grave companionship. He would have liked to take away many of the books attracting him, had he been in a position to afford it.

Numbers of the old works—those, for instance, at the top—he could barely discover the nature of. It was evident their resting-place was seldom disturbed. Lower down, in ranges according to subject, and for the most part in uniform binding, were the standard pleasures of our ancestors. Nearer to the ground, long lines of later and less valuable copies caught the dust first. The trappings of the shelves, discoloured maroon,

scalloped, torn away from nails long bereft of their brass, presented useless reminder of what had been. The dirty skylight admitted the light, with very much of the dirt and very little of the sky. Against the door, behind what we may term a lobby of books tempting the passer-by, was a pile from which the boxes outside were replenished at public prices—viz., 2d., 4d., and 6d. It was a heterogeneous assortment, and Mr Weir fancied he might disinter something useful. It was the very earthquake amongst the letters, where Jack was as good as his master, and all of them on their heads. Mr Weir picked out a fine geographical treatise, and an old mathematical tutor, and had both eyes open for an odd volume of history, if such happened to be there, when Mr Grattan crossed over to him with a couple of works he believed of use. And so they were, at the price he put upon them. Then he returned to the fixtures, to look for one or two others, Mr Weir meantime turning his lot over in quest of that history. He had removed several books from a shelf when he saw at the back a volume upon which the mice had purveyed riotously; brown old leather covers, the brown old leather nibbled and scratched from the layers of card; thick, rough, crinkled pages, yellow and spotted, and here and there eaten away, the printing whereon was of a curious character—new to him; just inside the cover were a crest and hieroglyphics, and, to his intense astonishment, his own name! For a moment he could scarcely credit his eyesight, it seemed so odd a circumstance, the more so as he was entirely ignorant of having had an ancestor of the same Christian name as himself.

"There's a book here I should like to have, Mr Grattan."

"If you please, sir, may I ask its nature?" The voice sounded very distant: the old man was stooping to reach one of the books from a bottom shelf.

"Well, I declare I don't know, I haven't looked yet. Oh!" glancing over the pages, "here's something of the History of England; policy of Harley, Earl of Oxford; passing of the South Sea Act; great speech in favour of the latter by the Chancellor of the Exchequer; tremendous rise in the price of stock, and election of Sir John Blunt as Chairman of the

Company. Oh, I see! It is a contemporaneous chronicle of the South Sea Scheme."

"You don't say that?" The voice was nearer; Mr Grattan was crossing over to look at the old work. "Why, it's the book my housekeeper was so desirous of referring to!"

"Your beef-tea is waiting, sir; I fear it may get cold."

The housekeeper stood on the second step at the end of the shop, just by the door giving egress into the house; the false ring to the assumption of self-control caused Saul Weir, natural to the backbone, to look round, and he recognised the dead-alive face seen at the upper window.

"Will you excuse me a moment?" pleaded the old scholar, with solicitude; "I have been but poorly of late, and my housekeeper wishes to take care of me."

"And very right. Do not hurry. I have all I need. This lady will take the payment, if you will tell me the worth of the five books I've selected."

"One and nine, one and three, fourpence, twopence, and this old history—well, I will say four shillings for the lot."

"Stay!" The white-faced woman came firmly forward, with perfect respect—"I have bought that book; we were only waiting to find it."

Mr Weir looked up with considerable surprise, and said, "Have you paid for it, madam? If not, you have not bought it. I maintain my claim to be superior—it contains my name; probably the name of my ancestor, SAUL WEIR."

Her face was white no longer; it burnt hot, and her eyes flashed excitedly. She turned, with badly-acted composure, to Mr Grattan, "Do you go down, sir, and have your beef-tea at once. Allow me to represent to this gentleman the kind of work I am engaged upon, and describe the invaluable aid the loan of this book, if I am denied the pleasure of buying it, would bestow upon my tedious labour."

"Yes; pray do not stay. I will leave the four shillings with this lady, and," smiling, "lend a listening ear to all she has to say."

Nodding with appreciation of the attention, Mr Grattan thoughtfully quitted the shop for a few minutes, leaving his

housekeeper, as was not unusual, custodian while the assistant and himself were away.

Mrs Steele knew perfectly well that as Mr Grattan had not taken a book down with him to read he would not be long over his repast. The most must therefore be made of the time. With earnest and an intelligently graceful manner, she began the narration of her long research, with its incidental discouragement; described how the progress of the manuscript was continued until she was stopped for want of the requisite information; told how this invaluable old work contained just the authentic data she had been so diligently searching after; and dwelt with enthusiasm upon the gratitude she should experience if he would but permit her to make use of it for a day or two, promising faithfully to send it by post to any address he might name. Mr Weir heard the lady out, carelessly turning the pages of the said volume, with an ease of manner that wellnigh caused an explosion, so exasperating was it—all unintentional, of course, upon his side. And then he replied to her tirade.

"I will put out of the question, madam, an old theory of mine as to the impossibility of doing two things at once; and, while every moment is precious to me, I will, if you have pen, ink, and paper at hand, make you notes in brief of all you wish to ascertain."

She found the kind offer awkward. "I should be sorry to trespass upon your time to that extent. Leave the book with me, I will take great care of it."

"It is very singular that the book should have been here all this time, and you have only just discovered its interest. I am alone in the world, without kith or kin. I have no relic or memento of those who have gone before. I have no sign nor symbol of an honourable breeding, and now that I've found something that belonged to my family, I'll stick to it." And with dignified bearing and heightened colour, Saul Weir put down four shillings, and went on his way.

CHAPTER XXII.

SAUL WEIR'S NEIGHBOURS.

NEXT door, upon one side of the house of Saul Weir the carpenter, was the establishment of

BERNARDIN, MILLINER;

the name upon narrow brass plates, the goods upon various pedestals and brackets branching from either side of the shop-window. Not an extensive establishment, no garish colour nor outrageous styles, but quiet-looking hats and bonnets, barely within the circle of the fashions, while acceptable to worthy folk who do not care so very much for this. Noticeable also were the old ladies' caps, hand-made by the fair owner, whose taste in this department found favour, and was greatly praised. Old ladies are very particular in the matter of caps, and seldom find a shop or a milliner who exactly understands their fancy. Mlle. Bernardin was exceptionally fortunate in this respect, and was esteemed by patrons beyond her own immediate neighbourhood. Upon two cards, framed and glazed, and placed opposite one another, were these announcements—

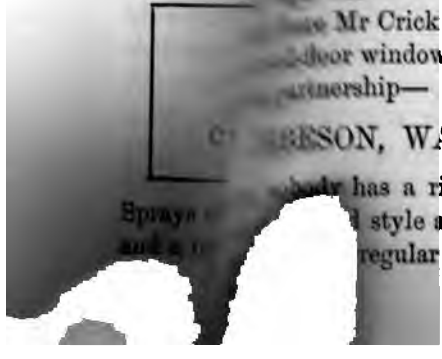
MODES ET COIFFURES.	FLEURS ET PLUMES.

Sprays of flowers, ostrich-feathers, ribbons of choice hue, veils, and a few ornaments deftly arranged, filled up the foreground,

the bottom of the window being laid with sheets of snowy paper, over which were unfolded piece silk-velvets. Mlle. Bernardin dressed her own window when her servant had swept out and polished the glass; and dressed it quickly, before customers were about, and while the sun was not on to dazzle. It was an office which had to be performed, but the young lady disliked it altogether; it was too conspicuous, passers-by stared hard, and it would have seemed that her standing upon a stool to reach the higher brackets was equivalent to inviting all the rude eyes of London to gaze up at her. She was very glad when she heard the shop next door was let; her own would not be so marked. Nice people too, thought Mlle. Bernardin, when the little girl ran in for a piece of ribbon to tie her hair back with, speaking so prettily that the young Frenchwoman took to her immediately. An explanation here: Mlle. Bernardin was of English and French parentage. Her father was of the latter country; he gained a precarious livelihood as an illuminator of Easter cards; never strong, his health eventually broke down, and Adrienne was left to comfort her mother and mourn in secret, for there had died an earnest, honest, pious man, whose affection was beautiful, whose diligence merited reward; that, however, is not always gained here. This man; his Parisian sister—a woman of taste in its quieter walks; and that English mother spoken of—a tradesman's daughter possessing good common-sense and much amiability—united to bear upon the girl's character an influence of the most pleasing type, and Adrienne grew to womanhood with the finest qualities ever gracing her sex, her nature and disposition alike lovely. Had M. Bernardin been left a widower, he would never have married again. Madame Bernardin did not take this view of it, and was reunited eighteen months afterwards to an industrious, respectable, cleanly pork-butcher, with a *prestige* for his make of brawn and sausages, and a remarkably neat home of his own. The widow, wise in her generation, reflecting upon the happiness of never wanting provision, and recalling with painful vividness times and seasons when Easter cards had failed to gild their past little lot, accepted the gentleman with the white apron thankfully; and in her grati-

...ce a nice little piece of pork, wrapped ...ed in a real country basket. And upon ...e bestow more tasteful contrivance than ... was the aunt in Paris who suggested ...r Adrienne, and who came over for a ... the way of it. The venture resulted ... scarcely do otherwise, Mlle. Bernardin's ...ming, her attention to business so ... trouble to her; she had fine patience, ..., and these enabled her to perse-

NEXT door, upon ... a select connection. carpenter, was ... Saul Weir's house was a queer sort ... excited the new-comer's curiosity, for ... house, factory or office, he could not the name upon ... the appearance of a private house, but pedestals and ... in and out, and the noises were so shop-window. ... ained the idea that business of some colour nor out... at all hours. There are some singular bonnets, barely ..., and as a rule it is well not to inquire ceptable to w... story and occupation of neighbours. But this. Noticeal... Mr Weir's vexed and perplexed him ex- by the fair o... some noisy houses about, and this was favour, and w... coming out and in all times of the clock, dark- cular in the ... lumbering over the floors and on the stairs; milliner who ... merriment; and some incessant crafts- nardin was ... without regard to time or seasons. This esteemed by ... aroused Saul Weir's interest the most, and hood. Upo... doing he could not conceive; and not being site one ano... quisitively, was not very likely to find out. ... was misleading, since a plate informed the ... Mr Crick abode, while upon the rusty blind ...door window dingy gold letters announced this ...rtnership—



...RSON, WATTLE, AND CRICK.

...body has a right to object to a firm because its ... style and title, nor to speculate how they ... regular nomenclature is not uncommon,

and partnerships are questionable elsewhere than in books; certain it is, however, the newly-arrived resident did not think any of the names next door to him upon that side attractive. Bernardin struck him as rather pretty and uncommon: the young lady was dressing her window the day he came to look at the shop; and standing on the edge of the pavement taking the customary inspection of its general appearance, he saw likewise his neighbour to be, and really he thought *her* very attractive—thought no more nor less, and forgot all about her from that time forth, until one morning she diffidently introduced her pretty self, requiring some cross bits of wood, which he might if willing fix for her for the protection of ordinary bonnet-boxes. Then Mr Weir noticed that the voice, Anglo-French, brokenly sweet, was unlike the *genus* milliner known to him. Daisy also came back with that purchase of hers glowingly in praise of the lady next door. A child like Daisy takes an interest in a next-door neighbour, and feels the happier when there is some kind one of her own sex there residing.

So many people went in and out on the odd firm's side it was impossible at first to learn which of the rough-looking beings were the owners of the names upon the blind. In and out the house, however, went more frequently than any one, a thin man of slender build, medium height, and bustling habits; this man he had heard addressed as Mr Crick. A thorough advocate for fresh air, Saul Weir had all the windows open until evening, thus there floated in at times from the front-door steps or backyard the snatches of the gruff talk. Once a more burly person, who might, for coarseness, have reigned over the company, swaggered into Saul Weir's shop, and asked for the loan of an oil-stone a while. The carpenter obliged him, not very favourably impressed by his neighbour, whose savage cast of feature, ferocious glare of the eyes, and bullying tone of command, produced a vague feeling of repugnance. The man's method of speech also was unusual. "Now, look you here, Mister! the man who borrows this thing is Eli Jebeson, and I'm that man! Eli Jebeson never forgets to pay back when he borrows!" This was satisfactory as far as it went, the

oil-stone being an article in continual use; but the venomous tone of voice left an unpleasant ring. True enough, the article borrowed was returned in a few minutes.

In the afternoon of the following day, a hansom cab was driven up to the odd firm's door: its fare extricated himself from the vehicle with difficulty, for he was a man of inordinate stoutness, and his infirmity appeared aggravated by sloth of the most unctuous type. Considerable luggage was upon the roof of the cab, but the driver had brought it off and placed it by the door of Mr Crick, long before his fare contrived to find the pocket containing his purse. The luggage all bore a stout W., painted white on black; and Saul Weir, busy with compass and square by his window, did not doubt that this remarkable round person he gazed upon was the Wattle of the legend above.

Thus, in process of time, he learned which was which: the acquaintance might stop in the bud, so far as Saul Weir's desires were concerned, for he did not like the look of any of them!

Of course it was not long before Mr Weir's housekeeper had something to say that would throw a light upon the business carried on next door. Her communication was to this effect: the firm, she said, were wholesale makers of wooden pill-boxes, they supplied the faculty, and did a large business. This was all very well, but Weir had been in the wood way too, and he knew, within a little, the octave of wooden sound; besides, these consignments must leave the place some time or other, a transmission that had not occurred to his knowledge while he had lived next door. The explanation would not do for Saul Weir if it did for his housekeeper, so he left her to enjoy it alone. The carpenter was not half so fond of pills as are some people, and was far from thinking they cured the case next door.

There was but little outdoor work as yet for Saul Weir. He was scarcely known. There is always sufficient work at home in his trade to employ spare time, and he was not idle. Especially did he look to the fittings in his house, supplying what the architects had omitted; according to his view, a very great deal. He took pride in making his place comfortable and

convenient; placed cupboards where none had been, fixed shelves, and bookcases for his books; made elegant little tables to please Daisy, and more useful ones for domestic purposes. In the scullery the boards had rotted, and he furnished new ones; the wainscoting was worm-eaten and he nailed an edging the entire length; the bedroom doors were addicted to groaning and creaking when they were touched, he remedied this by having all their hinges off and changing for new. The look-out at the back was exposed and altogether disagreeable; he, at some pains and with great nicety, erected a strong trellis-work, and planted creepers that would in time drape it with a curtain of foliage. All the windows admitted the draught, he supplied new sashes, in readiness for the winter, when he might be too occupied with orders to do the work of the house. Depend upon it, this Saul Weir was a useful sort of man as a tenant!

And all this time the studies made wonderful progress. He joined an educational class, found they did not teach so much as he knew and left it, subscribing instead to a library of sensible English and Foreign works. Long ago Saul Weir had mastered the languages he considered most of use to him — French, Italian, German, and Spanish, in their rudimentary form, and he pursued his reading, devoting a night to each, and the remaining nights of the week to English. He was nothing unless systematic, and the method he observed kept his mind in healthful training.

But of all that he learnt, of all that he studied with fond attention, Daisy took pre-eminence; the delicate companionship supplied the only thing wanting to render his nature matchless. It was striking to note how that strong man—strong morally, mentally, physically,—would sit at the book-strewn table, and look into her clear eyes as though he saw therein the fount of all true wisdom, and as though she stood before his earnest desire for the wise and good, its emblem, its beautiful growth. There was tremendous love for somebody in that heart of his, with its largeness of feeling and its tenderness not spoilt by the world and sin.

Be sure that the precious volume he brought from Liverpool

met with honoured treatment, and was cared for with much affection. He was honestly proud of it, while the ciphers under the crest absorbed no little thought after the hours of study; but it was one of the languages unlearned by him, he could neither make head nor tail of it, and, truth to tell, did not think it of any great consequence; certainly not while he could fathom language so much pleasanter in those eyes watching his every action with profound sympathy. A good school had been found for Daisy, and the discipline of the morning and afternoon made these quiet evenings with him seem of infinite delight. It was not like Mrs Potter's home-tuition, and the first day her eyes were often tearful, but she honestly believed she would learn more here, and bravely persevered. In the evening it was pleasant to tell Saul the progress made; and they worked at the exercises together.

Their good-looking neighbour, the milliner, seemed disposed to be friendly, nodding amiably to the child when she saw her, and with the courtesy of manner peculiar to the French, indicating by agreeable expression the wish to speak. Daisy told her guardian, and it was like him to take her to Mlle. Bernardin's and purchase the prettiest and most becoming hat that lady could fit on his little friend. Hers was a head that repaid the cleverness expended by the milliner upon the article, and as Mlle. Bernardin lifted the mass of glorious hair to place the elastic thereunder, it was with a light admiring play of the fingers and a remark upon the child's attractiveness. It pleased Mr Weir, who agreed with her opinion; then, looking round with characteristic minuteness of observation, he noticed some bonnet-stands, useless through being broken, and, "I'll take those things in with me and set them right for you," he said, without ceremony, gathering his arm around them, and handing her the money for their purchase. This good-humoured piece of neighbourliness quite took the heart of the unaffected ingenuous girl, alone in her business, aloof from her kin, the one who had loved her most unable to care for her now, and she thanked him in trembling tones, and when they had gone shed a few quiet tears.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ODD FIRM IN COUNCIL.

We have previously been admitted to the house, to the private retreat of Mr Crick; we enter now that larger and wider apartment above the down-stairs' front-room and passage, at the window of which the three queer names irritated opposite residents, and caused nervous old clerks plodding off to the City to grasp their umbrellas tightly round the margin as though to ward off something ominous.

In the house of the firm, Mr Jebeson, Mr Wattle, and Mr Crick, each owned his private room and furniture; to save bother, however, the house was rented by the latter gentleman, —taxes, housekeeping expenses, and business liabilities being equally shared.

A blended English and American population likewise used the house, and whether as work-people or clients, were similarly rough and eccentric in appearance. If a commonwealth, its wealth was emphatically in its commonness. Some people do not study the exterior, of themselves or others, and the members of this connection were amongst the number. Crick was the most respectable person amongst them, and on that account was deputed to pay the rent and keep in with the landlord.

Jebeson, Wattle, and Crick, originally, were brokers—furniture, glass, china, pictures, bronzes, &c.,—attended sales and salerooms, and owned an irregular sort of auction-mart, open in the evening; of late, however, this blind for distinctive swindling had been sparely carried on; a terrific venture involving costly working now engaged their time—one that

would, if success favoured them, recoup their outlay at the rate of a million per cent, and they thought that superior to broking.

The firm, in fact, hoped to appraise the Treasure upon which so many greedy expectations were set, and which certainly would, some day, turn up for the benefit of somebody.

Mr Wattle was seated in a wide wooden arm-chair, smoking the longest pipe procurable, on the mantelpiece was a cigar-box filled with sawdust, in use as an ash-tray; he might have been taken for an easy-going old Dutchman, or for one of the comfortable old traders, returned from taking the evening walk on the left bank of the Scheldt, near Antwerp, or sitting smoking on the posts watching country-boats at anchor. He was a lazy, suave, deceptive individual, because, from his appearance, one would have imagined him incapable of designing crafty schemes; yet no wedge-like conspirator was gifted with more accomplished shrewdness and penetration. Owing to his prodigious sloth nothing was a trouble to him; he took his own time over everything; and it was astonishing how well he fared; nobody put him out, no circumstance discommoded him, his soul was so protected by the oleaginous it could not be grieved, while feeling was dormant as in the digestive organs of a Laplander. And with this shield from the unpleasantnesses troubling less protected people, he practised artfulness with an immunity that entitled Wattle, of Jebeson, Wattle, and Crick, to the brass medal for audacity.

We do not breathe freely in the company of the members of this precious gang, yet the chronicle transports us amongst them for a few minutes, unpalatably.

Standing at the window, and looking narrowly down at people passing, Crick, the member interested in marine stores, heard, without interruption, the ferocious Jebeson describe something of evident interest and importance to them all.

"But I'll read you the letter," Jebeson was saying gruffly, and holding it up before him like a newspaper, "this 'ere is what she says:—

'ELI JEBESON,'—

that's her way of addressing me, generally,

'The book is found; the writing is upon the inside of the cover. It is now in the hands of one Saul Weir, carpenter, descendant of 'South Sea' Weir, once owner of the book. The first imperative commission is, obtain the book, the next, transfer it to me, when I will decipher the inscription; and as I alone possess the key to this, false play will not serve you nor your rascally associates. SOPHIA STEELE.'

Ain't she a complimentary sort?" asked Jebeson, apologetically.

"I should like to have that woman here," grumbled the obese one, with oily glutinous smacking of the over-lapping lips; "I'd—I'd—well, demmy, I'd sit on her!"

And as this threat, if carried out, would have extinguished life in the form of the frail lady of letters, it was sufficiently expressive to please her singular connection, Eli Jebeson.

"It certainly is a remarkable circumstance that the very man should come so conveniently near to us; a satisfactory sign, I fancy, that the prize will become ours."

Thus the thin man by the window.

"What's that you say?" asked Wattle, who habitually failed to follow long sentences.

"That we shan't have to go far to find the carpenter."

"The book's next door, and we want it; that's the job, eh?" observed the corpulent.

"We'll have it," muttered Eli Jebeson, surlily; "but that ain't all; how about parting with it agin? My name's Eli Jebeson, an' that man is agenst partin' with a thing once he's got it. We've had a sight o' trouble arter th' darned bullion, in the old iron way, an' if it's to be read on the book-cover and we can't read it, why, let's employ a man of our own to do it."

"It isn't likely we'd oblige your friend, Jebeson, depend on it! I'll engage to have it unriddled in double quick time." The other two smiled at Wattle's remark; they were familiar of old with his double quickness.

"Tell you what I've been thinking;" Crick saying this walked from the window with an air of some importance; "if the carpenter *is* a descendant of that Saul Weir, the miser, who knew all about the Treasure, he is a lion in the path!"

His clenched hands, knuckles downwards, rested hard on the table; his hard thin face set rigidly malignant; the eyes of the others watched sharply the expression: he continued, "And the lion must be hunted, if we are to secure the fortune; that is my opinion."

They understood his meaning, and were silent. Then the burly Jebeson with hoarse lowered speech, thus summarised: "After it is found we shall not be safe while the man of the same name lives, ain't that it? And if he's the one man with a real and the only claim, why, dang me, but he oughtn't to be alive even afore we find it!"

Wattle puffing away at his long pipe, puffing out his overpuffed cheeks, looked cunningly from the corners of his puffy eyes, laid his fat hand on the table, traced thereon with a short fat forefinger, and delivered himself of this sentence:

"Have him in to do some work,—fix a bench in the cellar, once down there he's all right, drop the trap on him and leave it. People come in to make inquiries, if they know where he is supposed to enter; tell 'em the job was for our sale-rooms and he's gone down there. If he *don't* go to the sale-rooms 'tain't no business of ours!"

The speaker puffed away as contentedly as though having proposed some scheme for the most philanthropic purpose. The others considered the miserable plot. Then Eli Jebeson, with customary ferocity, stamped impatiently with his foot. "I ain't very fond," he said, "of having a living witness in a cellar either,—it's risk at th' foundation and it ain't pleasant; but dead men tell no tales, nor claim a ancestry that's unconvenient for honest dealers. I believes there's a man named Eli Jebeson about, and from the little I knows on him it's safe for me to declare he don't stick at trifles, and this trifle he'll polish off shortly, barring accidents."

Not a member of the firm was under five-and-forty years of age; there was no semblance of mercy in any one of their

faces; brutality was their creed, avarice the motive power; no voice was raised to condemn the murderous design; tacit approval of the purpose might be gathered of their undisturbed attitude; Wattle smoked on, satisfied; Crick stood with hands behind him, calm as a philosopher, wearing an almost conscientious air of inflexibility.

They could hear the carpenter working at his house, next door, striving to make it comfortable, ay, and elegant. The sounds were a reproach—they told of honest industry; there was a music of truth and earnestness about them—and they grinned with sinister meaning.

They would snare this lion, and quickly put a stop to his music!

CHAPTER XXIV.

MEADOWFORD TRADESPEOPLE DISCUSS THE PRUDENCE OF GIVING CREDIT TO MADAME DE GONSALVO.

As no new houses were built at Meadowford or in its neighbourhood, and since those residing in its tenements were long-lived and never quitted their homes, it will be conceived how the advent of a new householder aroused the interest and set the wary bristling with judicious caution, especially when it was ascertained the increase to their population was of foreign extraction. If Meadowford drew the line anywhere it was definitely at the Continental; foreign English were observed with distrust, but when it came to beyond the Channel the prejudice was severe.

Although not an expensively-rented house, the Hermitage was one of the most pleasantly situated of all the villa residences of Meadowford; and much the good people longed for either some sociable tea-giving and talkative widow lady, or else a couple of affectionate and simple-minded elderly maiden sisters, who would unite with that strong band in which Meadowford already gloried. But it was not to be, and speculation could not have been more perplexed than over the family recently domiciled at the villa—in such distinct contrast to the late ancient inoffensive and highly amiable tenants, who had been compelled under medical command to remove to a seaside abode.

Very careful observation had been kept, and after a while Meadowford believed itself possessed of reliable knowledge concerning the inmates. At first it had gone wrong, supposing the genteel and ladylike Englishwoman who superintended

everything with such quiet yet business-like precision to be the new tenant; but anon a regal woman, of carriage and beauty that struck Meadowford dumb, was seen, and, it was remarked, did not go away again; neither did the other person. And after recovering from a surprise partaking of confusion and dismay in equal proportion, Meadowford resented it!

The knowledge gained industriously amounted to this: the haughty woman (Meadowford settled it she was haughty) was named Madame de Gonsalvo; the Englishwoman was a Mrs Pomfret, a sort of companion-friend or housekeeper, taking supervision of the domestic arrangements. One maid in attendance completed the modest establishment. Yet even in this Meadowford saw danger, for who in Meadowford had ever included amongst a Meadowford household a sort of companion-friend or housekeeper taking supervision of the domestic arrangements? No, thank you! Meadowford wives and widows, who were all respectable women, preferred doing that for themselves. They had heard, and believed, that when anything of that kind was going on there was something wrong somewhere, and that there was something wrong with the occupants of the Hermitage nobody needed to be told.

It looked uncommonly against them when the Englishwoman, after failing with Starch, went down to Fig's, the other grocer, and asked for credit, in the name of a woman of whom nobody knew anything, and whose name nobody could utter. And it was common justice when Fig at once put on his hat and called on his neighbours to place them upon their guard, and announce the line he was taking. And Fig was just in time, for he found the housekeeper had only called upon Rolls the baker, who had promised to supply them with bread, but who decided, upon hearing Fig's errand, so destructive of confidence was it, only to send up yesterday's bakings. In the course of the round Fig called on his friend Woolly, the draper. Mr Woolly was asleep when Fig entered, a customer in front of Mr Woolly was dreamily handling the texture of some fabric, passively content until such time as Mr Woolly should awake; for

in Meadowford, business was conducted upon strictly somniferous principles, and it was understood by customers that the recognised nap would be taken, between the fatigue produced by conveying and displaying the several articles. Mr Fig aroused his friend from a refreshing forty winks over a reel of cotton, and with a jerk of the head indicated his wish to speak with him, and evidently, from the earnestness of the jerk, upon something of importance. Mr Woolly walked softly to another counter and gently awoke an assistant, to whom he transferred his customer, thus reviving to a new interest in life, and then Messrs Woolly and Fig proceeded to a little back-room, where Mr Woolly invited his friend to have a glass of his own green ginger wine. Fig did not believe in it, but drank it to be sociable, and something warm therein stirred the enthusiasm which animated him upon setting out.

"I've called about these people of the Hermitage, they've been to me to know if I will give quarterly credit. I couldn't see it!"

"Did they offer you references?"

"Not a bit of it; and when I asked for three it was not convenient to refer me to any one in England, as Madame's friends all lived abroad, but she thought perhaps the paid-up books of where they had been residing—Tunbridge Wells—would serve as well. I told her outright, paid-up books were no guarantee books would continue to be paid up; and would she get me a line from the lady's banker? The lady did not bank in England. So altogether I declined it, and I should advise you to do so, for, judging from her style, her costuming account must be pretty considerable."

"You'll see she won't try it on here. These sort of people buy at one of the smart shops in town and have the goods sent on to some hotel, from which they are gone before the money can be sent for; that's how it's managed. But you see they can't do without eatables very well, and they purposely come down to some quiet place where they fancy it easy to take the tradespeople in; but I think we're up to 'em, eh, Fig?"

"Don't take long to see through her, I guess! You'll find

there's more of 'em about!" And with a singularly prophetic manner, the speaker held up half a glass of the green ginger wine as though it were the mystic crystal revealing the future.

A sonorous voice was heard in the shop asking, "Is Mr Fig here? We saw him come in?" and a minute afterwards Steak the butcher joined them.

"You called at my shop" (to Fig)—"sorry I was out; seeing you come in here, thought I'd step over and ask if it's about these new people at the Hermitage,—a queer lot, I'm afraid!"

"Well, we don't want to prejudice you; of course every man knows his own business best, and it's nobody's place to interfere with other people's business; but we've a decidedly bad opinion of this party's principles!"

"Well, I only go by my own observation, and deduce my own conclusions;" and puffing, Mr Steak sat down on one of the hard chairs, but with a look of wisdom, nevertheless. "When I'm in the market, if a man is particular busy at recommending the points of one of his cattle, I looks on that man with caution, and on the animal too. I can discover quality for myself, and find a cross-breed in the dark; although it wasn't in the dark I drove past the Hermitage, but it was just when a very queer character was going in at the garden-gate —maybe you've seen a wild-looking young fellow about, in a grey suit, and rollicking past nohow as you may call it, without any business or respectability in it. I took in the plates o' sweetbread, and moved the ox-tails higher."

"What did I tell you?" said Fig, with grave meaning, to his friend Woolly; "it's a gang on 'em."

"Well neighbours, we needn't trouble ourselves, we know how to watch our own interests; I've told Mrs Steak, if there's anybody calls, to say meat is so dear we can't book it,—send a ticket and pay on delivery, or with next order; that, you see, avoids offence, and don't lay us open to much risk. But you'll excuse my running away, man at the slaughter-house waiting for me now." He ran away, puffing. Mr Fig went on to Pullet's the poulterer. She looked like a person who would be fond of poultry, indeed prefer it to butcher's meat. Pullet was down at the farm, but Mrs Pullet was in the desk,

and Fig lifted his hat to the lady. There was but one poulterer in Meadowford, and as he charged what he liked, these Pullets had feathered their nest. Mrs Pullet, who admired Mr Fig rather more than did his own wife, was fluttered at his entrance, and plumed herself behind the window before he came round to the desk.

"La, Mr Fig, and it's you to be sure; I hope I see you well, sir?"

"Very well, Mrs Pullet, and I thank you ma'am; leastways, so far as the anxieties of business will permit of."

"Take care, Mr Fig, and don't overdo it, for good people are scarce!"

"It would be quite as well if the bad ones were, ma'am; but, as I gather, they're spreading!"

"Goodness! What can you mean? You're not talking of these showy people lately come into the town?"

"To be sure I am, Mrs Pullet; and we, most of us, think it unwise to give credence to their plausible representations."

"Well, Pullet was saying this morning our price for fowls is six-and-sixpence, and that covers risk; this is to parties we don't know, between ourselves, Mr Fig."

"And very proper too; unfortunately, I can't do that; the beggars know the price for double Cheddar, and everything else for that matter, in our way!"

"But, seriously, are they shaky?"

"Seems to be the general opinion!"

"I thought as much when I saw her long train and the out-and-out cut to her mantle. Says I to Pullet, 'fine feathers make fine birds!' but show me 'em when they're plucked!"

"Good!" laughed Fig; "very good! We cannot be too careful; and, as Members of the Board of Health, we are, to a certain extent, mindful, or should be, that the peace and prosperity of the community is not endangered. Really, in our day, one doesn't know who's who!"

Cordially taking leave, Fig next went on to Carp the fishmonger, who had a little piece of information of his own iced till somebody came along, thus Fig found his friend properly charged. The Carp item was an ominous one, and

in the opinion of Fig, made things look worse. Carp was an energetic Baptist, and disclosed his discovery with horror—the people were Roman Catholics! It is difficult to see how this would impede their honourable discharge of all just claims, but Carp observed with vehemence, "And that's quite enough, you know."

"By which you express disinclination to open an account with them?"

"I couldn't!" replied Carp, solemnly, leaving it to be supposed their religion, and not his distrust regarding their solvency, was responsible for it.

This movement on the part of the tradespeople did not apparently affect the family at the Hermitage, to whom, at regular intervals, came cases and boxes from London, while hampers of fish, game, and poultry, also arrived in their season. For bread, the attentive manager of Madame's household discovered a small farm where sweet home-made bread was arranged for, and sent each market-day when the cart was coming to town; from the same accommodating homestead fresh butter was procured, and new-laid eggs. When the tradespeople of Meadowford learnt that Madame could and would do without them, they turned upon Fig, very much annoyed, and actually accused that prudent man of business of arousing a prejudice against the lady at the Hermitage! "And," said they, "business isn't so brisk, we can afford to miss the chance of securing a good customer like that!" And they sent her circulars and cards, all of which were of course consigned by Mrs Pomfret to the waste-paper basket. Mr Fig felt the ingratitude of his fellow-townsmen, said that Meadowford was not a progressive place, and there was not much wonder at its remaining stationary; withdrew interest in it with contempt; had a quarrel one day with his old friend Woolly, whom he awoke after a shorter nap than usual, which made the good man feel cross; and finally sent in his resignation to the Board with which he would ally himself no longer. Thus the stagnation in Meadowford was slightly ruffled.

CHAPTER XXV.

ON THE FREE LIST.

WHERE are the artists of England and Spain? We need them to depict a scene, fair beyond power of the pen to portray.

The subject: a mother and her son.

A sweet hauteur, blended with gracious gentleness: the beauty of a line whose beauty was in rivalry with its majesty: these were the characteristics of them both.

The homage of the boy was so exquisite, chivalrous, tender; it almost atoned for the loss of a Court, and this is nearly the loss of a world. He never once forgot, in all the warmth of filial affection, that this beloved mother was a Princess, and his Sovereign.

Like most Spaniards of birth, Prince Sebastian was a worshipper at the shrine of the beautiful, and nowhere on earth, he was well convinced, could be found the peer of his admired mother.

And, in spite of her sorrows, she seemed youthful still in his eyes. Like the goddess supreme in Iberia and Hispania, to him she would never grow old.

He brought with him from college, diagrams and charts to pursue his studies. Leaning over these, the fine profile of the boy may be caught as at no other time: his lady-mother catches it thus, and the splendour of it creates agitation of tender solicitude. She arises with simplicity that is still majestic, and stands by him, as she will stand by him through life; a hand on his shoulder, and glancing fondly upon the curls, clustering round the brow as though they were proud of the station, the circle where laurels and the

diadems of monarchs seemed to her imagination in chaste rivalry.

He looked up from the line of territory, into her large languid eyes, and he murmured, "God, my mother, may restore our provinces, but it would divide us, and I welcome the banishment which unites."

There was a pretty toss to the head at the words, gracefully proud as that of some Arabian charger. She kissed him for the sentiment, and he valued the kiss of his mother not less than that of his Queen—it was the rare and choice reward of his best ambition.

She glanced, swiftly and sadly, at the maps, whereon dominion looked so small and so remote: saw the close writing of a perished hand, where one, now living but in history, had penned the boundaries of states and cities guidingly for this prince, his son.

"My father's first maxim, 'No accession of provinces compensates for the loss of happiness, or the reproof of a wounded conscience,' will bear reversing, dear mother. I feel that although your people prove ingrate, palaces and their possessions be denied us, empire be ours but in dreams; yet are we richer, for love is ours, and that is of God, celestial. Do not look sad, it often grieves me to feel that pensiveness may be regret."

Thus would he try to dispel the sorrowful oppressive memories. His words always cheered her, and in her heart she agreed with all he said.

Sometimes he would try to woo her from her despondency by reading aloud the classics of their land—Cervantes's 'Persiles y Sigismunda' and 'Viage al Parnaso;' Camoen's 'Os Lusiadas;' Lopez de Mendoza's 'Proverbios;' Lope de Vega's 'Comedias;' and the quaint old piece of chivalry and romance, 'Chronica del famoso Cavallero Cid Ruy Diez Campeador.'

Or he would read the 'Kings of Granada' of Pascual de Gayangos, until a deep glow settled upon the dusky skin, and the boy burnt beautiful, his soul thrilled, enthusiasm on the cheek and in the eye; his hand straying mechanically to his side, where in his father's days he had been wont, occasionally, to wear the sword.

So proud of him, she watched every attitude intently, and when he read how the princes of Spain fought, in the flower of their youth, she shuddered slightly; all her pride for him was not equal to such crimson sacrifice. And this tiny dwelling, the absence of all state, and retirement under a plain lady's title, seemed allied to a wonderful content. He would remark the involuntary shrinking at the mere thought, and, pausing, say, "No possible glory would tempt me to imperil life, now you have only me, dear mother!" It was said with a firmness brave as the heroism with which, had his father lived, he would have taken his place in the field; the manner, quite as much as the assurance, made her feel happier.

And she seemed to have never really known him—his disposition and nature—back in the days of their state, and while he was yet an inmate of the College of Santiago di Çompostella. She knew him to be frank and affectionate, chivalrous and honourable, but did not suspect the tenderness, thought, sympathy—the exquisite regard for her. Exile and banishment develop qualities undreamt of; with the loss of empire arises empire in the heart; the confiscation of property may create a soul. This Princess of Spain absolutely did not know her son until he joined her in this retreat. Very priceless appeared the possession now, and deep was the gratitude experienced that he was spared to her. There had been apprehension in her mind previous to his joining her, as to whether so quiet an existence would be welcome or even healthful. Would he not demand the facility open for military study, or the curriculum offered by the universities? Would he not solicit permission to move in society—indeed, require it as his right? No. When he realized the position they were now placed in, and their reduced condition, he admired the grace with which his beloved widowed mother received misfortune, and the resignation she displayed before the will of Heaven.

There was little experience, and perhaps but little wisdom, while the years numbered in all but seventeen, yet there was self-possession, and a contentment superior to ambition. While of Spain, the nobler qualities of the people were his: that feverish unrest and love of turmoil; that zealotry of

religion and politics, so consuming and so despoiling, were worthily absent from his nature. It is not to say but they might be kindled; it is to say that a grand ideality, placid, youthful, the calm and placable side of chivalry, was predominant.

Of course there were outward and visible signs no submission to circumstances could quell or erase, such as the distinguished mien, the erect proud bearing, the faultless beauty of features, the duskiness of skin, the warmth of complexion, the eyes that were languidly soft as those of some high-born Moorish girl,—these were not to be extinguished, and a pretty commotion they caused in Meadowford. "My patience," said one, "but he walks as straight as though he was one of the Town Council!" and another, "What airs some people give themselves! Only to see that young foreigner! How he carries himself! One would actually think we were not good enough for them!"—remarks accompanying contemptuous tosses of Meadowford heads.

The people were so rude—even more rude than at Tunbridge Wells—that the Princess very seldom ventured forth,—at first only in companionship with Mrs Pomfret, and after the arrival home of her son, with him. And they went quiet walks, the gaping labourer or some chance cart from the town alone annoying them. The Princess preferred society, and disliked the dull flat ways so different to their loved land at home; but it was more agreeable than the vulgar staring of the townsfolk. They were very sensitive, and felt the cold inquisitive eyes before ever they looked up and found them watching.

They had only been visited by two persons, and these were attentive in calling—one, the reverend father of the church of their religion, close by; the other, a kind-hearted lady, poor, like themselves, yet of her modest means aiding wherever possible, and to those impossible to aid giving friendship—the most precious gift she ever gave. This lady resided some distance from the town, at a pleasant cottage known as The Retreat. Crossing Meadowford meads, one came upon it suddenly, embowered in the midst of trees, a lawn,

large garden, and paddock; at the rear, dove-cot, stables, and old-fashioned yard, presided over by a huge retriever, generally couchant on the roof of his kennel. The river Ford, which went peacefully flowing through the town, and dreamily on through the reeds of the meadows, laved the lawn, which sloped to its brink; and there, below shade of the trees, Lady Emily Fuller loved to sit in her easy garden-chair, reading some devotional work, or engaged in knitting for her poor. Her ladyship, truth to tell, had been more prepossessed by Mrs Pomfret than by the queenly stranger; but the family altogether was so interesting, so superior in station, so utterly aloof and alone, her sympathies were enchained,—and the casual friendly call developed into appreciative intimacy. The visits to The Retreat broke the monotony of existence at the Hermitage, and the occasional calls at the Hermitage varied the even routine of life at The Retreat; and of this union of the retirements sweet confidences had formed, and the days of either were none the less light for pleasant helpful intercourse.

Lady Emily had, in her day, known trouble of a keen and scathing sort. Her husband died in Paris; when some woman, not his wife, was by. Her son proved cruel and heartless, and died in foreign service under a rebel flag. Her ladyship's good work, fine piety, and generous characteristics, were the outcome of trial and disaster. Thus there was sympathy, rather felt than expressed, from the first. Woman so soon reads when another has gone through the dark waters; and nationalities, creeds, politics, and tastes, shrivel before the mighty and fierce leveller which breaks the spirit upon the wheel of misfortune.

Before Madame de Gonsalvo (the Princess was thus known to her ladyship as to others) learnt the troubles of their friend, she alluded to her son, and quickly remarked how the subject pained. It indeed pierced the sensibilities of that mother, whose wounds were far from healed, although brought under subjection. With exquisite fervour she had loved the cold, treacherous man-child, the thorn-son and blight upon all comely motherhood; and this mention of one

beloved with so fine a fervour set her all quivering; it was an old anguish the study of devotional works had not assuaged. She could not enter into explanation—had neither nerve nor courage to take out and uncover that weird sorrow. Some griefs are too sacred for such scientific exposure. Lady Emily Fuller in no sense belonged to the people who keep afflictions like geologic specimens in a cabinet, to take out and hand round to every chance looker-in for an hour's gossip. True, this fresh and exceptional acquaintance proved more inviting to confidence than was usual; but even here all might not be told at once; the shadings of her life's history would be won of her by degrees. Like all quiet natures, Lady Emily possessed an abundant fund of reserve. Her sorrows, like her sentiments, seldom were seen on the surface. Plain, neat, good, her outward gear symbolised that inner nature. Meadowford people, who found a designation of some sort for everybody, used to describe her ladyship as "a Quaker." Her ladyship was no more closely connected with the Society of Friends than with the Roman Catholics, of whom she knew but little. In sect she belonged to the Evangelical side of the Church of England, in religion she belonged to the Gospel; and the religion being broader and wider than the sect in this good woman's estimation, she would sit out the death-throes of Catholic or Quaker, belonging for the time to either or neither, but always the tender and true and sincere.

"May your son be long spared to you!" was her quiet reply, so full of feeling. "May his face never be turned from you, nor his heart seek any other love than yours!"

Madame de Gonsalvo thought it a singular comment, but imagined it possibly a peculiarity of the English to proverbialise.

Upon the beautiful September evening when we discover the inmates of the Hermitage at that private study of maps and diagrams, they were disturbed by a ring at the door-bell. Mrs Pomfret was taking an evening walk by the wish of her thoughtful mistress. They heard the maid, however, attend the summons. All day they had been expecting to hear from or

to see her ladyship, and it occurred to them this might be some communication from The Retreat; but when the maid appeared, bearing upon the salver a huge thumb-marked yellow card, they knew not what to think, and looked at the thing with humorous surprise, without touching it. The imprint thereon was large and distinct, in bold black English characters, surmounted by the English arms:—

Further speculation was rendered unnecessary by the person at the door exclaiming, "Make my apologies to the lady—Mr Dobson's apologies—and it's the only card I have by me; but it bears my name, the best recommendation I believe, and I shall feel obliged by her admitting one!"

The maid looked at the Princess, and with shocked timidity. The Prince arose indignantly to ascertain the meaning of the intrusion; when, to the surprise of the others, Her Highness, with a graceful inclination of her head, gave permission for the speaker to enter. She remembered his name very well; had one of his old bills somewhere, hidden away in a desk; she desired to know more of that girl with the sweet youthful face and the eyes so hauntingly beautiful.

Passed in, unabashed and refreshingly indifferent to trespassing, Mr Dobson bowed briskly, and with large assurance opened his business; time was valuable to the indefatigable caterer, and he was not going to waste it whatever the method of entrance.

"You'll excuse my calling, my lady, but you was aware of my coming by posters in the town and its vicinity. The Panorama has arrived; we open to morrow, Wednesday, upon which day and Saturday there will be morning performances, under distinguished patronage. It is for this I venture to call upon you. It is not clear to me whether my agent did so or not; in any case, I claim your kind indulgence, and solicit the favour of your interest and patronage."

Mr Dobson was pat with this little piece, having used it to every one alike—"nobility, clergy, and gentry"—for some years. The manner of its address, equally with the professional twang, was intensely distasteful to the particular youth, who was horrified to hear a person indulge in such freedom of speech while in the presence of his mother. "Permit me," he said to her in a low voice, "to inquire what this means, while you retire?"

Of course Mr Dobson did not know that he was standing in the presence of a lady of royal antecedents (not that it would have affected his self-possession had he done so), but apart from this he entertained profound respect for householders of an independency, whatever their caste or degree.

With a look the Princess indicated her wishes to her son, and he stepped back, with duty albeit with surprise. Then with a sweetness of manner impressive even to Dobson, addressed him—

"I live so retired, sir, I am unable to accede to your request. Publicity is distasteful to me; but I have no doubt your exhibition fully merits patronage."

"It has been before the public some years now, my lady, and the public considers it A1, in fact the most bony fidy entertainment travelling. We don't only profess to amuse, we hopes to instruct. For instance, now, suppose you couldn't go abroad, my Panorama serves instead; France, Holland, Belgium, and the Rhine, occasionally varied by a glimpse of Switzerland and Italy, with Spain thrown in. Now what, my lady, can people want more for their shilling when I throw 'em a bit of Spain in gratis?"

Mr Dobson struck the large philanthropist attitude—thumbs

in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, chest expanded, coat flying back, disclosin capacious and generous-looking pockets, one foot forward, head slightly upon one side, and face beaming with large-hearted satisfaction. Dobson's was a success, and Dobson was proud of it; and Dobson believed it was owing to his throwing a country or two in when the patronage justified that principle of annexation.

To the lady it sounded roughly, bitingly, coarsely ironic; a scathing satire upon the fate of rulers and their possessions. She acknowledged by a gentle inclination of the head the disclosure of his tactics. His manners were really so very free she did not at all know how to question him concerning the young girl of whom she desired to know more.

"We do not attend the lectures and entertainments given in the town, but my son will hand you the money for two seats, your best."

"I'm sure I remain your devoted servant, my lady," said Mr Dobson, with a gallant bow, adding with original candour, "Whenever we can't gain patronage, it is a great consolation to get money. I thank you, and hoping you'll pardon the liberty, solicit your recommendation. We are only here for a fortnight, and then go on to Suffolk."

"You say 'we,' sir; you allude to the young man who called here before your arrival. When staying at Tunbridge Wells I saw with you a girl, your assistant's sister I have understood; I hope she is well. She attracted my attention, and I have not forgotten her!"

"Dear! What an honour! Very kind of you. Yes, my lady, it is a curious circumstance, but more than one have expressed interest in that young person, and she is, I do assure you, quite deserving of it, for a more modest and pleasing girl does not exist. I only wish her brother would agree to her joining in our entertainment, if only with a song or two; but he is most particular, not to say obstinate, upon this point. I don't press him, in case I offend him; he's one of those people to take off bag and baggage at a minute's notice, put him out."

There was a broad familiarity about their visitor altogether

unpalatable to the fastidious Prince Sebastian. His royal mother graciously overlooked this in the interest she experienced.

"Have they been with you long?" inquired the Princess, kindly.

"Not very," replied the proprietor of Dobson's frankly; "and I don't know where on earth they originally came from, but it suits my purpose to keep 'em, that young man being educated, and so to say of real gentlefolk manners, and he won't travel unless his sister goes also—queer start that! Of course when in advance for me, just for a day, he don't run to the expense, but leaves her at their lodgings: same as this morning, he went down to Ipswich for to-day, but will return by last train, ready for to-morrow."

"No doubt his sister is dull, having no friend here; she may come and sit with me an hour until her brother returns." The Princess unconsciously and from long habit put this as a command, without any supposition of its being denied her, nor was it.

Dobson, reared and nurtured upon patronage, applied the same favour to others. With friendly warmth he exclaimed, "Well, now, this is very good! I'm sure we have no right to expect this kindness. I thank you much, my lady; I shall be passing their place shortly, and will deliver your message; meantime I remain your most obedient!" Mr Dobson ducked politely to the lady and her son, then backed to the door, where he bowed again; and so to the hall, where he whisked out a red pocket-handkerchief and blew a terrific peal, for which Dobson was famous. The maid held the door open for him to pass forth, he bowed to the maid; Benjamin Balsam was doing up the garden, and with marked civility opening the garden-gate, Dobson bowed to the gardener also; then well pleased, and blowing another jubilant peal, went post-haste to the next residence of importance, to finish off that district before returning to the town.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONCERNING JESSIE'S VISIT TO THE PRINCESS.

WHEN Mr Dobson entered the room where Jessie was sitting, quietly and happily, at work, he greeted her with an outburst in the true Dobsonian style.

"Well, my girl, busy as usual during your brother's absence, and dull I'll be bound; but cheer up, I've made a new friend for you. One of the greatest ladies hereabout, to all appearance, sends you, by me, an invitation to go up and sit an hour with her! So put on a clean collar and furbish yourself up a bit, for she's quite a person of style, I do assure you!"

The girl, unruffled by the news, smoothed her sewing, and looking up with a very winning expression, replied, "Thank you, Mr Dobson, I never go out while Merry is away, he prefers my not doing so; and I've always plenty to do indoors."

"Now, bless the girl; what a specimen of particularness it is! Why, you'll become as confirmed a prude as your brother! This invitation is one in a thousand, and you little know what it may lead to! When you have been on the road as long as I have, you'll learn the policy of making friends with the reserved seats. Of course, if it was some man of fashion who had taken a fancy to you, I shouldn't persuade you to go; but this is a widow lady of the utmost respectability, and there is no telling what she may do for you!"

"But I need no such friend, Mr Dobson; we shall be going away shortly, and why displease Merry, as I'm sure it would do, by making the acquaintance of strangers just for an even-

ing? I think you will see this is unwise. Merry protects me, and I have him alone to look to; the very least I can do is to study his wishes while absent, and busy myself upon what house-work there is to do!"

"Yes; that is all very sensible and right, but you ought to think of the Panorama as well! Remember that it is a great advantage to have a lady or gentleman of influence and position on our score of patrons, not for money alone but also recommendation. I like Mr Tattergast, and his services are valuable, but the Panorama and I are older friends, and I never lose sight of the Panorama's interest, so that you will do me and the Panorama good by waiting upon the lady, more good I fancy than you'll do Mr Tattergast by remaining indoors. I'm not a selfish person myself, and I don't admire it in others, especially in those I have tried to benefit and from the first shown kindness to."

It was true, and it placed poor Jessie in an uncomfortable position, between the desire to obey the wishes of the absent, and the dread of appearing ungrateful to, or of offending, Mr Dobson, who resumed—

"I admit I value Mr Tattergast's services; he is a talented and conscientious young man, very different to my late lecturer, who was talented but not conscientious; and who upon one occasion emptied all the reserved seats for me, describing a race of blacks he had lived amongst, whose only garb was a portion of the properties of a missionary they had eaten—several quires of black-edged note-paper and envelopes, which he declared the tribe distributed, and were thenceforth known on the coast as the Oxford Clan. It was such an abominable story—did no good to the Panorama; but he certainly was an out-and-outer for riveting the attention of the audience. Mr Tattergast is almost as successful, and without going to such extremes. Now, why won't you help the business? Unite with your brother in making it popular, if not in public, in private, when so good an opportunity offers as upon this evening? But you'll have to be quick, or you'll have nothing of an evening, to be back by coming in of the train."

With a compliant inclination of the head that was exquisite

yielding, had any one been there to understand it, the girl laid by her work—thimble, cotton, needle, all neatly placed in the little work-box, Merry's last gift. She was strangely quiet while doing so, yet had never looked more pretty. The thin delicate features, clear complexion, bright expressive eyes, and wealth of soft-hued hair, made up a face so charmingly innocent and fresh-looking, Dobson exclaimed, "Well, dang me, if I don't wish you were my daughter, instead of Tattergast's sister! Not to harm him by the thought either."

Although so childlike, her reflective manner caused her to appear older than her years. The sadness of her youth had toned the nature to a gentle, tender thoughtfulness, and the contentment coming with the new life shed a sweetness upon the disposition that was noticed by every one.

Jessie was quick of movement and never loitered, and it was in quite as short a space of time as the Princess could have wished when the piquant face, under the rustic, simply trimmed hat, presented itself at the garden-gate of the Hermitage and paused a moment irresolutely, somewhat bashfully; for a handsome boy stood on the lawn, lightly stroking some bird of gorgeous plumage, and when the young beauty appeared at the gate, he looked up surprised and pleased, and red on the cheek as the flower he wore on the bosom of his embroidered doublet. "*Contra fortuna no vale arte ninguna,*" he said to himself, whilst walking to the gate with immediate gallantry and holding it open for her; with a grave smile, thanking her for the ready response to his mother's wishes. Jessie did not know what to say to this dark-skinned, piercing-eyed youth, upon whom the princely bearing sat wooingly as upon Hæmon, the noble Theban lad, who died upon the tomb of Antigone. Her embarrassment was brief; he led the way into the house and ushered her into a small and pretty room, bower-like with flowers and shrubs, and animate with uncaged birds. It was all so novel and unexpected she felt half bewildered; the little excitement imparted more colour than usual, and when he returned to inform her that his mother would be pleased to see her in an adjoining room, the picture startled him with its simple, unadorned

prettiness. The introduction was as novel to him as to the girl. And he was not in the least surprised at his mother's prepossession. He conducted her to the apartment where the Princess reclined upon a couch, and Jessie could not lift her eyes to that lady of surpassing elegance. Then she heard the voice, unlike any voice that had ever echoed even in her most treasured recollection—"Come here, my child." Gently as it was spoken, it carried the imperial gentleness that is unacquainted with refusal, too kind to be a command, yet too commanding to be misunderstood. Jessie walked lightly to her side, thinking that proud head with its radiant hair the most beautiful sight she had ever looked upon. It was natural that an unsophisticated little mortal like this should be so impressed, natural that the gracious kindness of one who carried her own greatness in her presence should create admiring gratitude.

"Do you know that we have met before?"

"To see you once, my lady, is never to forget you. It was on the Promenade at Tunbridge Wells."

"Thank you, yes. I, too, do not forget. I have thought of you since, frequently. Now do not feel afraid of me; we are alone, you can set your timidity at rest. Give me your hand; see, now, you are composed; let us be friends; I have none too many, but among them, the little girls in my own land were the most constant, and in sorriest days brought me flowers, and their love, and kisses. I have hungered for their sweet companionship, my child, the only thing true and unselfish. Your dark lovely eyes recall those that, when days were sad, illumined my path more glowingly than the fire-jewels of fable. Will you try to look into my face as though you loved me; look devotionally into my eyes as you would, say, into those of a dear Queen, whose heart is with the girls of her people. In this way they used to look. Can *you* look thus, and, if you like, think of me so? But not if it spoils the love I seek first, seek most."

"It will not, for to love you must be like loving a Queen, when lives are offered in the devotion of a glance."

This remark very much surprised the royal lady, so un-

reservedly avowing those emotions that agitate Queens, and will, so long as Queens are human, however they may be suppressed by those to whom the privilege of exile is denied. Yet when she thought of the pensiveness natural to the child, the remark did not seem so unwonted after all. She had been accustomed to that devotion, had drunk eloquent draughts of it from eyes that are most capable of expressing it, those glorified by Murillo, and that leap and flash in the Baylë of to-day, when La Sarabanda, La Chacona, Las Gambelas, and El Hermano Bartolo, startle the precincts sacred to Sant Jago.

Jessie thus far knew nothing of the royal estate of this lady, but there was that indescribable air and manner about her which indicates the most exalted station, no matter the incognita.

"Your reply could not have been more pleasing in my own country, where speech is flower-like and very sweet. We have an old proverb in our tongue, '*Quien pregunta no yerra*'—'Who asks errs not.' I am now assured of your friendship, and it is very welcome to me; I would attach you to my fortunes, if it were possible, but you would not care to leave your friends?"

The Princess having motioned Jessie to a low seat beside the couch, her arm encircled the girl's neck; and an elaborate filigree bracelet, in silver gilt, of old Spanish workmanship, whereon flowers were enamelled in white, and embellished with rubies and pearls, became interwoven with the soft brown tresses while the lady caressed them with her hand. Sitting rather below her, Jessie could look up into the splendid eyes with that devotional affection of which she had told; the look, however, was sad in reply to that question.

"No, I should not. When homeless and forsaken by my father, a home and affectionate protection were given to me. I have learned to love dearly the goodness which prompted such a deed, and—I—am loved in return, my lady."

The artless unaffected confession strengthened the lady's regard for the interesting pleader; it accounted for that brotherly solicitude to which Mr Dobson had drawn attention. She inclined her head with assenting approval, being the last to

require ungenerous sacrifice. "I understand. No, you cannot leave your friends; but if you should ever again need a home, think of me. Now, what can I do for you? Take this bracelet" (removing it from her arm and placing it on that of her visitor); "you cannot wear it yet, but when you grow tall and strong, you will wear it in memory of one, a stranger, an alien, with little left to give save friendship. Hope, my dear, is the rainbow of the soul; and as the ancients loved best the flowers and trees upon which the rainbow had appeared to rest, so to my heart hope arisen of my tears beautifies all it touches. You have known sorrow, so have I! Your consolation is in your friend, mine is in my son!"

"A consolation to be proud of," said Jessie with *naïveté;* she thought so. The Princess looked pleased. The words charmed her as much as the girl's beauty.

Jessie would not stay long, anxious to return home before the darkness set in. The entrance of the servant with wax-lights was the signal for departure.

"Will you tell my son to come to me?" asked the lady. With a respectful obeisance the servant quitted the room. Prince Sebastian needed no second bidding; he was longing to look again on the fair face which had stolen into a heart's frame not yet filled with the portrait of a first love. The pretty look of innocence with which she guilelessly lifted her eyes and glanced in his, confirmed the good impression of their first meeting.

"You will walk with our visitor, Sebastian, to the end of this dark road?" He bowed; Jessie gratefully conveyed by a look her thanks, but with some concern and diffidence. It was scarcely in accord with her exquisite ideas of devotion; and admiring the young gallant made it rather worse. No such scruple disturbed him; he contemplated the dull road, for the first time since being at home, as a delightful track, flower-strewn, planned purposely for the converse of doves.

"Shall you be able to come and see me again before leaving the town?" asked the Princess, holding the girl's hand with reassuring indication of the warmest welcome.

"I think not, my lady, but if I can do so, I will."

"Thank you! And you go from here to——?"

"Ipswich, I believe."

"Yes. I do not know it, but distance need not deprive us of the consolation of remembrance. We shall think of one another."

"And I will pray for your ladyship's restoration to those you love."

"Thanks, dear child—the prayers of so good a heart cannot fail to be heard; whether answered, must be directed by One in whose wise hands are the reins of destiny."

There was but little conversation between the youthful pair: a bright moon was overhead, and it lighted up their faces; such silent pictures speak best; and, like all pictures, are better learnt by rapt intentness than by the jingle of chattering comment.

Jessie would not permit her companion to proceed beyond the end of the road, where the houses were closer together; the town's northern boundary. After leaving him she ran swiftly home to their lodgings, and resumed the work upon which she had been interrupted. She was engaged upon this when Merry Tattergast came in, his face beaming upon thought of returning to her. He noticed directly that she did not appear quite at ease, and he questioned her as to the cause: she told him at once, kept nothing back; and, although annoyed, he could not but feel flattered by the distress she appeared to have been in.

"Am I forgiven, Merry? You see how awkwardly I was placed!"

"You are very much forgiven, dear one; it is only Dobson I am angry with."

"He will never understand you, nor your objections; let it pass. If I am forgiven, I am happy; so overlook the rest. And now tell me how you got through the day?"

"All right; I believe we shall do well in Ipswich; it is quite a large place. There is a quay, and flourishing coasting trade; timber for the dockyards, and corn and malt to London; there are manufactories; and it is a military station. Some of the seats in the neighbourhood are of size and extent, and I

expect Mr Dobson will be more than satisfied with his choice of patronage. One beautiful old house I was much struck with; it is called the Herongate, and belongs to one of the most genteel families thereabout, owning a deal of property and being much looked up to."

"What a curious name! it recalls old times."

"Oh yes, it has quite historic associations, I believe. But now, about yourself, how has the day sped? the quicker for my absence?" Holding both her hands in his, a merry questioning look in his beautiful eyes.

"No," said she, candidly, "I have been very dull indeed; you know I am always dull when you are away."

"Poor little girl! Well, Jessie, we are saving money now, and one day may have enough to—to——"

"Yes?" turning away from the pleasant twinkle in her friend's meaning eyes.

"Start a Panorama for ourselves, my darling!" and with this playful rejoinder, and a light kind kiss, he left her to go out in search of Mr Dobson, to whom he would communicate the day's success.

"How nice," thought Jessie, crooning tenderly over her needlework, "to be saving! why, we must have put by nearly seven pounds, Dear Merry, how careful and economic he is now,—how good to me still!" And, half mechanically, she played with the Spanish bracelet—thinking.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MERRY TATTERGAST.

MR TATTERGAST found Dobson busy with the erection of his exhibition. Two men in shirt-sleeves were hoisting up the Continent by the light shed from one gas-burner. Mr Tattergast whistled a merry air to announce his approach; it echoed down the empty space, and Dobson looked in its direction. Sauntering from the dusky end of the Assembly Room he discerned his lecturer, and greeted him.

"Back again, Mr Tattergast? Well, how did you get on?"

"Engaged the Corn Exchange, sir; and I believe we shall have no cause to regret going down."

"I allus make my mind up not to do that beforehand; if the public can't appreciate the entertainment that's the chief thing to regret, not our giving 'em the chance!"

"Whichever way you like, sir," said the lecturer, good-humouredly. "I meant to say, that the neighbourhood looks populous and well to do; there are several important seats round about!" Mr Dobson's eyes twinkled.

"That's the style, young man; the seats supports us, and allus will, I hope!"

The young man, who had been walking about all day, looked round and not discovering a support sat down on a box, whereon the expressive word, DOBSON'S, denoted its connection. He looked tired, and the kind-hearted manager invited him to come and have some steak and a cup of tea. Declining this, Mr Tattergast proceeded to enter into particulars, and acquainted his superior with the holding capacity of the hall, the terms, the chief ticket-sellers, and the prin-

cipal residents of the neighbourhood; and Mr Dobson listened with the greatest attention, asking, "And these are all?"

"No," answered the young man slowly, "there is one other, indeed, in point of position, the chief; but the gentleman has an invalid daughter and would not, I suppose, be likely to go to places of amusement."

"I hope you don't confound my entertainment with such!" cried Mr Dobson, jealous for the *prestige* of his instructive exhibition. "I believe if a man has a hundred invalid daughters he can come to see the Panorama, and bring the daughters with him! And besides, how do we know but he'd engage us to exhibit it at his house, if he has a room big enough? Some of these country gentlemen are not in the least particular when trying to give pleasure to their families. And now about the road, is it heavy?" The Dobson properties were transported from town to town in a vehicle not unlike a furniture-van.

"From all I can gather it's pretty level."

"That's a blessing! Careful there, my man, if you please." This to one of the helpers whose annexation of territory was upon the Goth and Vandal system.

"Can I do anything here to help you?" courteously asked the willing lecturer.

"No, I think we shall manage, thanks; and you'll be glad of a rest to prepare for to-morrow. Be here by half-past one, so as to be quite ready by two."

Wishing Mr Dobson good-night, the lecturer returned to Jessie.

"Now, ladybird mine, for a quiet half-hour." How her face lighted up with joy, he was so good to come home to her instead of remaining out later. Merry valued those quiet half-hours too dearly to bestow a single unnecessary minute elsewhere.

"I have given our friend all details, and he seems very satisfied."

"He ought to be. Would any one study his interests as you have done to-day?"

"And my own too, dear. I have looked into every garden, and that of the Herongate I walked into; it was so irresis-

tible. And this reminds me, you shall walk up to-morrow and see that matronly Flora, Madame Root; I must have a flower for my dress-coat as usual; and she is very obliging; and you may perhaps see—some of the hothouses. But you are not so great a lover of flowers as I am."

"They always seem to me more pleasing in the hedgerows, coppices, and fields——"

"You mean to say you like them a little after our design—unobtrusive, artless——"

"And natural!" added she, smiling. His light banter was always pleasing to her, because it was never unkind.

"True. I hold it to be a privilege to live unfettered. My whole life has been a travesty upon restraint."

"Merry," said she, pleadingly," you have never told me anything of that life, not even if the name you bear is your own, or one adopted in some idle freak out of pique or necessity!"

"The latter, sweetheart-sister, the latter. It was made a condition years agone, when I came into property which I was far too natural to keep, that I should drop my name, and not resume it unless some other natural laid claim to it! I let the name go,—the property was not long going after it, and I haven't cried for either. My name is not so euphonious as that you know and love me under, and I am sure you would not thank me to change it."

"But how came you to entitle yourself so oddly?"

"I will tell you, pretty one. The day of the important event of changing my style and title, when I really was in a most disreputable condition, I stood aghast at my tattered state, yet merry withal. Do you see? Run back—Merry—Tatter—aghast. So suggestive may be misfortune!"

"Well, upon my word, what an idea! If all the world caught their address from circumstance——"

"Which really all the world does, or did originally. But now, talking of pretty names, let us have another peep at your bracelet." He fastened it upon her arm,—a white lady-arm whereon it looked comely, while the royal name stared him in the face with a splendid haughtiness. "And you feel you love this lady, Jessie?"

"I should do so if with her much; I have only seen her twice, you know! The first time she impressed me beyond the chance of my ever forgetting her; this evening she caused me to feel as though in the presence of some sad Queen, whose graciousness alone remained of all her former majesty. Her heart, she says, is away in some sunny land, and I remind her of the girls whom she loved for their——"

"Beauty and sincerity! Do not be afraid to say it, Jessie. If every Princess had as devoted ministrants, sovereignty would be a desirable state. And I assure you, speaking for myself, as Merry Tattergast the First, I am too excellently satisfied to surrender my dominion to any other ruler." Lightly though it was said, it left no doubt of his resisting any proposal having the transfer of Jessie to the house of the Princess for its object. His protection of her was unselfish in its origin and carrying out—was pure as the fine friendship of a Bayard; no social fear deterred his chivalry. They were both outside social circles when they joined fortunes and made one for themselves; a magnificent Ishmael from desert tracts of European cities, indifferent to men's praise or blame, living up to a standard of independent right, without a regret for the past, a pang for the present, or a care for the future, even adopting from a dweller in tents the passport, "She is my sister."

His was the stainless heroism which credits no wrong, nor affects a compromise with charity by pity which is half disdain.

Light and pleasant though his talk was, he seldom indulged in laughter when with Jessie. He knew that laughter is very easily misunderstood. When life is so sad, laughter seems rude. The exultation in an eye may be at times an aggression.

With all his knocking about, Merry Tattergast had preserved a delightful boyish freshness, and had kept his heart very young. Often his more serious moods revived a youth of exquisite enjoyment, when he wandered at will, it is true, but with such a sense of ecstasy, such thorough participation in all that lends wing to the birds and butterflies, it was one long flitting in the regions of enchantment; and at this day

when weary, the cry of his heart is, "Back to grand designs, back to days of youth, back to life's strong spring-time, with all freshness, fragrance, and pure purpose. I tire of this inert maturity, wherein I find manhood but another name for dead ideals."

Next morning they started on their walk to the florist's. Meadowford was yawning and gaping resentfully; for it was an unusually bright and sunny morning, and it almost seemed as though the sun shone thus strongly to reproach its sluggishness. And it was not to be expected Meadowford was going to put up with this, even from the sun. The young men and others taking down or winding up the shutters let that same sun see they were not going to have their somnolent rights interfered with; so that nothing was gained, after all. They took supplementary naps midway with their operations; and so uncertain was the aspect when Tattergast and his sister appeared in High Street, that he believed they were just closing the shops preparatory to a half-holiday. Their appearance animated matters, so far as the eyes were concerned; for one and all desisted from any sort of movement to stare unflinchingly. Passing a being who seemed struck even more conspicuously than his fellows, Mr Tattergast, by an abrupt side-step, stood by him, and peremptorily asked the way to the town. The being, at this, stared harder, with consternation and an outraged expression. The stranger repeated the question, modified—

"Will you kindly inform me how far it is to Meadowford?"

This was out of all reason. The being rested the shutter he was making unsuccessful attempts to embrace, against those not yet taken down, and went into the shop, where he sank upon a chair, and dozed, bewildered.

"Well, this is an exciting place, Jessie." The girl laughed.

"I like it for its quietude," she remarked.

"But not for its stupidity!"

"That has not troubled me, Merry;" adding, after a pause, "I would rather have to do with stupid people than with many, I think."

"You believe them inoffensive, and liable at any moment to become sensible!"

"If you like to put it that way. Remember all have not your activity."

"Activity, Jessie, is a tremendous help towards enabling one to preserve self-respect—an awkward quality as mankind is constituted."

"Work is both a help and a protection."

"Work, my dear, is a shield; idleness a target. I have tried both."

"It is more honourable to work."

"True. Honour is not the appendix to a rent-roll; it is the energy of right, and its perfection is determined by its stanch support of truth. True life is—living truth."

"You will end by making me wiser as well as happier; but I think I knew that before. I know" (looking down with a mournful prettiness that touched him) "how I long for my life to be a living truth."

"Yes," he replied, with great tenderness; then, after a fashion peculiar to him, turned it off with the lightest of remarks: "I cannot say *that* longing has been my portion. I have rather delighted in presenting some of the choicest fiction an airy irrepressible harlequin especially delights in. But here we are at our conservatory. Let me see what is most becoming for the ball." With a smile, warming back her happier look, they entered at the florist's. The gardener's daughter was sitting behind the counter, arranging moss in cone baskets afterwards to form the receptacle for appropriate flowers. She looked up at their entrance, and her delicate face was suffused with the most delicate of blushes.

"Now, Miss Lily, I've brought my sister to see you. Not afraid of admiring your sex, you will please admire my sister very much."

The girl was overwhelmed with confusion. Jessie, likewise, felt uncomfortable; but he was not looking at either, and it was said with so unconscious and playful a manner, while he fondly stroked the velvet leaves of a plant in the window, neither could feel embarrassed long. But the gar-

dener's daughter looked with instant intentness at the lecturer's sister, and covered a little sigh with the moss. He turned quickly, and, with the same light air, added, "I am pleased to make you two young people known to one another. I hope it may lead to long and agreeable acquaintance." He was off to something else in the flower way on the instant, leaving the girls to look oddly one at another, neither knowing what to say, both thinking how pretty was the other. It was very mischievous of him, and he enjoyed it.

"You arrange that moss with great taste," said Jessie.

"I place it carelessly."

"In nature, Miss Lily, it is the careless which constitutes the taste—at least, so my sister thinks." Jessie looked down. The quick eyes of the other noticed it.

"Do you wish to see Mrs Root, sir?"

"I have neither wish nor objection—just as it comes; it will grow upon me, and I shall be prepared." The girl smiled against her will, his coolness was so aggravating. He had not seen her smile before, and was struck by the added beauty to her face. Jessie noticed his pleased look, and it fell like a wound. She was suddenly alive to a thought not hitherto present, and it turned her cold—how possible it was for Merry to meet with one whom he might think so much more pleasing—in her modest humility she would not even think "beautiful"—than herself, and how, certainly, the charming qualities essentially his would captivate others besides herself. Altogether, Jessie wished they had kept away from Root's, Florist. Now, it was like Merry—very much like Merry—to have done this thing. Really he wished to see the gardener's daughter again, but would on no account have paid a stealthy visit unknown to Jessie; so he took her with him, and felt supremely happy to see those two fair creatures together. And he did not commence mentally comparing them—weighing them in his critical balance—but having got them together gave them joint admiration, in so far as his favourite flowers would permit.

Jessie was much taken with Lily,—thought her gentle and reflective, two qualities commending themselves especially to

her. Their wandering life admitted of no friendships. She had not indeed had a friend of her sex, and sorely the heart had often felt the want of it. If Merry's light words could become earnest she thought her choice could not fall upon one more likely to prove a good, kind, and true friend. Although of humble station, the gardener's daughter was prepossessing by qualities usually associated with her superiors—refinement, delicacy, and sensitiveness.

Mrs Root entered the shop from the house and bestowed a frank smile upon her droll customer. "If I didn't think I heard your voice, and good morning to you, sir!"

"Good morning, Mrs Root! couldn't help calling upon you again, you see."

"That's right, sir, and it's an oncommon fine morning to be sure. A pretty lady with you; your sister I think, I heard you say, and sure enough you're alike as two peas. Let me see if I can't find her a rose to wear in her frock." The good woman proceeded to cut an exquisite little flower, the selection of which so pleased Mr Tattergast he exclaimed, "What a kind soul you are! I declare it really does one good to come and see you!"

Lily liked that—the woman had been as a mother to her—and she looked up gratefully. That gratitude for another struck Jessie as being the most amiable trait she had yet discerned in this new acquaintance.

"We're not all born surly and with sore backs, I do hope," answered Mrs Root with a pleasant laugh. "And now you want one for yourself?"

"I will pay for mine, many thanks, and let me have a white one. I am with the Panorama, opening in the town to-day."

"Blest if I didn't think so! I says to my man yesterday, after you'd gone, 'Depend on't it's one o' the gentlemen come along with the Panorama. Sich manners,' I said, 'wouldn't be natural to nobody else.' I wishes you a prosperous time, sir, while you're here."

The gardener's daughter, meanwhile, was curiously scrutinizing the pair allied with a public entertainment, not unkindly but curiously; that footlight and platform life so hedges in its

votaries! Neither had Lily the exalted opinions concerning it evidently possessed by her friend, Mrs Root. Mr Tattergast handed the last-mentioned lady a couple of tickets for the entertainment. "Perhaps yourself and Miss Lily would like to look in some time before we go."

"Many thanks, sir, and so we should; and as for Lily, she's allus ready to go to anything likely to improve her mind."

"Ah, Dobson's is guaranteed to do that,—it's one of our strong points!" This was uttered with dry gravity, the quiet half-cynical temper the gardener's daughter did not like in him. Her father entered with a tray of seeds.

"'Morning, Mr Balsam,—laying up for a rainy day?"

Benjamin acknowledged, and, "Hope you're well, sir."

"I am better, Balsam—better. And if I came here often I should rob your flowers of all their colour—of course I mean the proper-coloured ones. You could move the blues and yellows out of the way." He was looking at Benjamin's daughter, who was not plying her decoration with the innocent composure usually witnessed.

"I told you, Benjamin," said Mrs Root, holding the tickets in her hand, "the gentleman was with the Panorama!"

"Is he so?" said the gardener, touching his cap; "I thought it more like the Panorama was with the gentleman." The distinction was not obvious to his mistress. The remark pleased the lecturer; with solemnity he put his hand in his pocket, took out a small silver coin, and desired the gardener to drink his health. Mr Balsam tossed it, with another contribution to philosophy: "Here's to your honour's health; may you not outlive your friends, nor die afore 'em!"

"You mean to say, make up a round party, Benjamin," said Mr Tattergast, laughing; then looking up at the shop clock, "We must be returning, Jessie."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE RESULT OF OLIVER REDLAND'S SEARCH.

To keep pace with events it is necessary to recount what befell Oliver Redland the alchemist. The old man had, he believed, by process of abstruse calculation, the outcome of a life's adherence to his mystical research, discovered the site of the buried Treasure. In his case, as in that of others, inference pointed to the garden of Mr John Clark, the wealthy farmer. Thither, as we know, he had contrived to journey, had gained access to the house, and during the harvest revelry had stolen down to that deserted portion of the garden, where, if ever nature conspired to cloak some vast possession from the world's suspicion, this part at which we left him digging downwards to his Treasure served for that hidden purpose. Some corners of large gardens, given over absolutely to neglect become very fastnesses, and in a diminutive way, wildly romantic. The tangle of wild creepers, wilderness of unpruned shrubs, tree-shoots springing up with daring unconsciousness that it was no woodland given over to the gipsies; the thickly interwoven weeds of giant growth, and network of bush and bramble, the broad-leafed trellis environing the retreat, and the shadowing caused by a near plantation, all seemed to indicate that it really was the sort of place where one would naturally suppose it possible that something had been done or hidden. The alchemist had no doubt of this being the spot; true, his calculations only directed him to this particular part of Suffolk, but as near as he could discover, the lines crossed at the exact position where the farm-garden was stationed. One could not get much nearer than that; and he rubbed his hands gloat-

ingly over the thought how certain other people would like to be as near. Those Beavers rather troubled him, but he would keep abreast of them, and if they were there with a similar purpose, as he more than half suspected, he would have the pleasure of removing the Treasure during their undisturbed rest. Mr Redland thought it only due to a life given over to science, and that had become its martyr, to secure without scruple the reward now within his reach. Had he not forfeited every other advantage life and station had to offer, impoverished himself and his boy, worn down existence itself until he was a mere wreck, and from the first discovery of the El Dorado in England, abandoned everything in the world in its pursuit? Surely he, if any one, was entitled to it, and certainly before retired traders, who had made a competency by business, and now insulted science and learning by dab bling in their idleness with its mysteries. This even more than rivalry in the quest for the Treasure led Oliver Redland to despise them with the most sublime scorn. The search after gold had produced an inferiority of soul he was conscious of and was sorry for, but he was still the scholar and the gentleman; for the proof of his unselfish nobility, once let him possess the Treasure, and a tenth of it should go immediately in the building of temples of science, cathedrals of religion, and library, institute, and athenæum; until, if the vulgar dared to point the finger, and say he was the man who had lived for greed, his deeds of munificence would rise up in witness of his unselfishness, and his death would be the death of the philanthropist to whom wealth is nothing, other than means towards an end of the most disinterested type. Thus thinking, he dug with despatch, and as noiselessly as possible, while the harvest moon came out and looked upon his work. It was a new mattock, a new spade, and the gleam of the moonlight on the implements seemed like working in molten silver. The aches and pains of age vanished before the fierce ardour wherewith he worked, and his eyes flashed not less brightly than the blue spade and the grey mattock. Ere very long the trench was deep, and he stood in it, up to his waist, to rest.

At that time, to that place, came Boggis and Blim, intent upon some quiet surveying, when there would not be the danger of officious interference. But when they heard the unmistakable sound of digging, they paused, with momentary apprehension, then advanced quietly, and, concealed by the thick undergrowth watched operations. The gentleman familiar with history was very willing for the old man at work to do the manual part of it; but as soon as it came to the disposal of the result, he would very briefly settle any dispute as to the right to the claim. He motioned his companion to keep perfectly still and watch the issue. They were in the shadow, the place was right away from the house, the old man was the only one liable to be discovered, thus their surveying was done under tolerably easy circumstances.

Oliver Redland resumed his work, and pursued it with a zest and vigour that caused Boggis to grow restless with excitement and satisfaction. They were bound to come at it in time—if there! The night was warm, the soil was hard and heavy; the hole grew deep, the heap grew high; toilingly he worked like some spectral sexton, grimly impervious to fatigue. Had some supernatural strength been given? The old man laboured with a might and main that took the unique firm in ambush fairly by surprise and admiration. Afar, the wide hall-door of the house was opened, servants held lights, two gentlemen equipped for a journey stood out upon the doorstep accompanied by the farmer; prancing of horses, then one of the men leading them up to the door; they mounted, and after the courtesies rode off, sound of their horses' hoofs becoming distant and more distant. With his head but a little above the cavity, Redland watching saw a man cross the line of light—a man who had not passed out by the front door; and by the peculiar angles of the momentary glimpse, he believed it was the younger Beaver. He desisted from the work, and crouching, waited. Behind the thicket the men still watching had not seen that described, and conceived the old man had found the Treasure or its encasing, and stooped to try to lift it, and they did not doubt for a moment but it would be beyond his strength. Thus a sweet entanglement was imminent, or

might have been, had not Phineas, with the keen scent natural to the pair, discovered the trench. He knelt, felt down with his hands, and brought up the man of science, as he no doubt anticipated.

"You *are* a diligent investigator of natural phenomena, Mr Landred!"

"Yes, sir; while you young men take your pleasure, the elders look after the more solid things."

It was said with a cool self-possession that left no doubt of his intention to continue the look.

"I wonder what Mr Clark would say to his garden being turned up in this fashion!"

"I wonder what he would! Probably that it is what this part of it wants, very badly. It is a long time since the soil hereabout was turned, sir."

"A most strange proceeding. A passing wayside travelling stranger, received hospitably because of his assumed incapacity for proceeding another rood, at work of this nature; and from the progress, evidently important nature."

"Of course it is—all science is important; in your little way you know that." And with disdain, and the virtuous stroke of honest labour, the devotee of science turned up another shovelful.

The moonlight fell upon the bilious-looking face of Phineas junior, and it imparted a ghastliness to it anything but reassuring. It did not affect Mr Landred in the least; he continued his work as though nobody stood on its brink, and the indifference nettled the other, who said, "Well, I think I'll go and ask my father to step here; he takes an interest in anything out of the common."

"Do so; and ask him to bring a lantern. He can hold the light to enable me to see the depth!"

This home-thrust quite broke any residue of good temper Mr Phineas was enabled to preserve, and he strode off to the house, returning soon afterwards with the beaming paternal Beaver, who called down to the old man he found still indefatigably working, "My boy Phineas told me something going on in the garden; and what's up?"

"Nothing yet," replied the voice in the trench, low down, while he bent to another load.

"But what are you going to do with that digging when it's done?" with marked innocence.

"Lease it to you, when I've got all I want out of it."

They hadn't thought all this was in that spare and wizened workman. Beaver senior murmured "God bless you!" in the tone of a benediction and with great benevolence, then blew his nose. Boggis and Blim in covert rather enjoyed this passage-at-arms, although beginning to survey their own position from another standpoint. And between the cupidity and cunning of the two worked the poor old worn-out student, presenting a suggestive problem, as the shrewd moves of the avaricious very often do.

"My Phineas is fond of exercise, can he help you?"

"I'm afraid so much stooping wouldn't be good for him."

"It's something particular you're looking for, no doubt?"

"Yes, sir; yellow ore. An especially useful product, of value in the laboratory."

"But what the dickens are you after it now for, at this time o' night?"

"It is more surely discovered by the light of the moon; and if you've finished your questions, I'll get on with my work."

"It's wonderful interesting, upon my word; we're so fond of anything in this way. My Phineas has quite a collection, as I told you. You'll stop with Mr Landred, Phineas, and look out for the relics; I must go in or friend Clark will be looking for us." And he trotted off, his red face as genial as ever, hands in pockets, the head set firm down in the shoulders, without an atom of the red bull-neck being visible, although the moon was full upon him to the last; he trotted indeed along its track, as though the main line of silver, and so entered the house, where they could just see him bring a hand down jovially upon the shoulder of Mr Clark, who was coming to the door to call him.

"You need not take the trouble to wait, Mr Phineas," said the digger, to whom this espionage was distasteful. "Any

relics found after all this work will be claimed by myself, you may quite depend."

"Or by Mr Clark?" asked Phineas, sneeringly.

"That, sir, we should decide without any help from other people."

"Well, my interest in your operations is so profound, I'll do myself the pleasure of seeing the end of them."

"All right; I hope you'll be edified in the end, I'm sure." And without another word the wearied workman resumed his throwing up of the earth; lower and lower, until he could be no longer seen, only the dull deep sound of his implements, the dull dead fall of earth to earth. The moon had disappeared from view, every light at the house had long since vanished, fowls in the poultry-yard gave warning of the dawn; the damp and chilliness tried all except the enduring digger, and he continued as resolutely as though some young man in the prime of life. Had he not waited years for this time; worked at more wearying preparation for it; made its issue his life's tenacious project? He felt no cold nor damp, the shrubs around and trees above kept them off him, as he thought, with deference to his purpose; as the mimosa droops its branches whenever any one approaches it, seeming, as Niebuhr narrates with his wonted fanciful grace, to salute those who retire beneath its shade. Hour by hour passed on; he had arrived at a great depth, and when light was flooding the land he ceased from his labour—unrewarded! It was pitiful that frantic embedding of his mattock, that would *not* strike upon the solid plate of iron he expected at every foot. Tremendous were the final upheavals of the soil, applying his remnant of strength for those last frenzied attempts. And all was unavailing; then he fell back against the cold earth faint and white, with the implements fallen at his feet, great drops wrung of the agony of disappointment upon his brow; and, reptile-like, the watcher on the brink glowered down on him jeeringly, throwing the taunt at him, "I'd rather you than me, Mr Landred, have had the working of this little digging." Sometimes a taunt, like a gust of keen east wind, shakes one from the lethargy of pain. Oliver Redland started from the

cold contact of that against which he had fallen, looked about him, and while he heard the receding footsteps of his tormentor, he sorrowfully addressed the baffling earth: "I've wrestled with you, brought you under subjection, gathered your innermost secrets, found you a good friend and ally, and at times a craven foe, sneakish, treacherous, and despicable; but I believe at this time it is I who am wrong, not you. If I pitched upon the wrong site, you wouldn't shift the Treasure to where I was at work, whatever I might be to you or you to me. My failure does not demonstrate that the Treasure does not exist, I am satisfied upon that point, nor that it is not hidden in the garden, although upon that I am less agreed, unfortunately; it simply demonstrates for the present that it is not at the particular part I believed, and owing to the turn of events perhaps it happened for the best."

He with some difficulty clambered from the excavation, and applied himself to refilling it; this of course was performed with more lightness and expedition. By the time labourers arrived and the farm-servants were about, the task was executed, and the worn, cramped toiler stole in by the back way and up-stairs to the chamber set apart for his use; there he deposited his implements, with others, and throwing himself upon the bed soon fell asleep, utterly overcome by the fatigue of the night.

The land-surveyors remained to the last, supported by whisky and greed; and it was a study to see them, after Redland's departure, walking over the ground. If Boggis and Blim looked an unprepossessing pair in the dingy London office where Timothy Figg was president of the works, they looked yet more unwholesome and saturnine in the grey dawn, as, with business-like paces, they measured lines and angles and applied the various tests of practical, theoretical, and swindling geometry, to their dexterous and adequate survey.

"The relations in magnitude demonstrate a proposition of the negativeness of the result!" Thus the learned Blim to his less-informed coadjutor, who grumbled hoarsely, "Why the devil don't you talk sense? We shall never come at it, if you don't ask the way in plain English."

"The definitions and axioms propounded by the immortal Euclid are all valuable. I don't know so much about them as I ought, but I do know them to be considered valuable; and although you may not recognise it, they either help or do not help us to arrive at conclusions and calculations essentially useful, to ourselves, in our business. I now arrive at a conclusion and calculation—it is this: we needn't stop here any longer; it isn't buried here at all."

The brutal bailiff-type of face wore an expression of dismay and amazement when his partner thus affirmatively stated the conclusion. Boggis quite depended upon its being there hidden. "Well, if that's all your larnin's worth, it ain't much good to anybody."

"I don't know: it tells us first it's not far off, and next that we need not waste valuable time ferreting about here; it's capital!" The speaker rubbed his hands with gloating enthusiasm. "The parties here will be better out of our way, believing, as we did, that it's hereabout; and they'll be working this plot while we're on the right. Much good may it do 'em!"

"I haven't a word to say agin' that, if you can point to where the right plot is. If you can't, why, all I can say is, your larnin's a smothering swindle!" His partner's learning was a sore point with Mr Boggis; it unpleasantly and too frequently illustrated his inferiority.

"That I can't do at present. I shall want to stop awhile in the neighbourhood and look round; it must be thought out to be accurate."

"Then it's sure to be no good. I never knew anything come of thought. Go at a thing and chance it, and hang all the thought! that's my motto."

They stepped over the low garden-palings, and walked across the piece of grass land, where, in the daytime, the pony reserved for the exclusive use of Louise, luxuriated and grew fat and idle; thence to the road. When clear of the place, Blim, who had waxed thoughtful, struck out at a crop of nettles, and javelined tiers of dock-leaves, while remarking, "Don't you think there's something queer about the little red-faced man and the callow individual? I don't

mind the old digger a bit, he's sincere; but the other two seem uncommon deep, I fancy, and carry such a precious respectable air with them."

"I somehow fancy I have seen the old one before, and I've been trying to recollect where; in the City though, but the place, I can nohow recollect."

"Well, it's evident they're only visitors; the longer they stop the better, for if they're here they won't be elsewhere. I shall put up at some quiet coffee-house in Ipswich. You can return to town, and I'll telegraph you if I learn anything of importance."

Boggis acquiesced after a surly fashion, and later on returned to London. Blim found the unpretending lodging to suit him, and lay down on the bed for a long sleep. At seven o'clock in the evening he turned out to see the town. It was Saturday, and there were many country people flocking in for the Saturday night marketing. Having explored the principal streets, he made for those narrower ones representing the old part of the town, and these were more in accord with his ideas of dirtiness and untidiness. He felt in his element, and scrutinized the various curiosities, and articles of use or otherwise, exposed for sale in the old dealers' shops, with the interest displayed where it is needful to kill an hour or two somehow. Amongst other things that caught his fancy was a stick, of formidable size and great age. Boggis owned a weapon of this sort, and a regular man-slayer it was: but Blim had no staff—beyond his learning—whereon to lean; and now that he was about to do some considerable walking about the country, he entertained an idea that this Herculean cudgel would serve him admirably—if not too expensive. It leaned against the dirty glass, the black figurehead of a South Sea savage for knob, a collar of discoloured metal just below. There was length, bulk, quality; it was massive and strong, well-seasoned, and no doubt in its day was considered a handsome stick. He went in and asked the price, and handled its bulky headpiece, yet not heavy with all its bulk, and became the possessor for a florin. He took a survey of the collar under the gas-lamp outside; it bore a name and date—*Saul Weir*, 1716.

CHAPTER XXIX.

INTRODUCES THE GREAT PEOPLE OF BEECHESTER AND NEIGHBOURHOOD.

BEECHESTER was possessed of a large and important railway station; it was quite impossible for any person to remain unconscious of the largeness and importance of BEECHESTER. From its great letters on the platform, acquainting the travelling world that it *was* BEECHESTER, to the imposing *façade* of its Literary Institution, the city was evidently designed to be seen and weighed in the balance of man's critical insight. Beechester knew perfectly well that if not counted one of the first cities of the empire, it was through no want of attention. By all the laws of architecture and design; by situation, by loyalty, by wealth, by genius, and by humbug, —it was in every respect worthy of that loftier classification which makes a man a citizen and his wife as proud as two. The ambition of successive mayors of Beechester had been, writing the city up large—in which patriotic movement they were assisted by the railway companies, brewers, house-agents, auctioneers, removers of furniture, and potted-meat factors, all of whom had an interest in magnifying the loyal borough. Although manufacture formed the staple source of revenue, it was more particularly for the wisdom and learning of its intellectual inhabitants that this important seat of culture and commerce was famed. Opinion there resembled the turf, with Knowledge, the prize at the winning-post, and with every man endeavouring to out-distance his highly-trained competitors; so that great was the strain. What came of it would have surprised the universities.

The sensibility of Beechester was impregnable. It was evident Wisdom had there built her nest! That the mantle of Solomon had descended to form the curtain of their Institute! That the plaster-of-Paris philosophers on the pedestals, in the vestibule, were inferior in point of phrenological formation to the long, shrewd heads, seen from time to time in the reading-room and library! The sensibility of Beechester was not to be wounded by adverse criticism; those who differed, those who reproved, equally with those who censured, were regarded with compassion, but were not privileged to indulge in argument, reserved chiefly for the learned discussions amongst themselves, and too precious to be wasted upon aliens. The philosophy of Beechester might have taught the world; it did not, and Beechester bore a grudge in consequence, and refused to be taught: thus it created its own, was self-supporting, and thrived amazingly. Which knew most, the ladies of Beechester or the gentlemen, is a moot point; and in the consideration of this delicate question it is only safe to affirm that neither assumed ignorance upon any subject whatever.

The journals representing party opinion in the enlightened borough were very much under the influence of those prominent intellects guiding its affairs of State. Ever since their leading organ rendered a remark of their respected Mayor, which should have read, "An uncircumscribed town council is liable to misdemeanour," in the slightly altered form of, "An uncircumcised town council is liable to misdemeanour," it was thought advisable that the tricksy sheets should be taken care of. Inspired articles, from that time, took the place of the vacuous productions of drivelling journalists, and the press of Beechester became a power—in the judgment of Beechester.

Great men lived close, and likewise lent the weight of their authoritative patronage. Dr Chancel, the Bishop, a scholar of profound learning, whose immoderate regard for the Fathers was only equalled by his regard for himself, was much looked up to in Beechester, and considered the chief dignitary. True, the Bishop was invariably engaged when the lesser men of

Beechester solicited his influence or personal attendance, but it was known that his researches in his study demanded unremitting application, and they were fain to be content with looking upon their prelate as one of those personages who become valuable by association.

Lord Gascoyne was the principal landowner, and his revenue had been largely augmented of late by the increasing value of building property. His lordship's seat, Beechester Towers, was a fine old building standing aloof from all modern institutions, and keeping a jealous eye upon the town's advance so that no encroachment marred the splendid view from the drawing-room windows. Lord Gascoyne entered but slightly into the affairs of Beechester, but, as in the case of the Bishop, his contiguity was thought much of; and although the Mayor privately informed Sir Toodleum Tummytot that his lordship was a man of singularly superficial attainments, in comparison with the erudition gracing other of the Beechester gentry, it was yet deemed advisable to gain his countenance for their extensive schemes of enlightenment. And Lord Gascoyne consented, in a good-humoured, kind-hearted way, to preside occasionally at this, that, and the other, contributing his donation, and swallowing unmoved the vulgar and fulsome speechifying of the city magnates.

Sir Toodleum Tummytot, of The Wilderness, Beechester, was another person of importance in every way, and he happily made up, in the bustling activity which characterised him, for any reserve on the part of the nobles aforenamed: it was as Dr Johnson well put it, when talking confidentially to the Mayor—"If Sir Toodleum hadn't the binding of some people, he'd a title that was in large circulation, and the name was preface sufficient to the volume of his worth!" The Mayor, Coleman Dukes, Esq., who was a little deaf, was much impressed by the oracular wisdom of their friend, Dr Johnson, and afterwards rendered his summary of Sir Toodleum's worth at a little confidential chat, in this guise: "If Sir Toodleum hadn't the lying of some people, he'd a title to the largest dissimulation, and an amount of face sufficient to fill [illegible]ole earth!" The person to whom the respected Mayor

communicated the Doctor's opinion, acquainted Sir Toodleum therewith at a friendly after-dinner gossip; but Sir Toodleum, thinking Beechester had found him out at last, took a philosophic view of the occurrence, professed to treat it with the contempt it deserved, and relied upon the privileges of his station to silence such ill-advised comment. Although the first knight of his name, Sir Toodleum was a person of substance, and had done much for their city. Such accidents of report were, therefore, not likely to seriously interfere with the reputation of their respected fellow-citizen, whose father, in potted-meat and other ways, had laid the foundation of a fortune amply sufficient to silence calumny.

Coleman Dukes, Esq., the Mayor of Beechester, despite his infirmity, which at times betrayed him into both ludicrous and awkward dilemmas, took a leading part in town matters; and more especially in all relating to literary and scientific advancement. Without the profundity and depth of their friend Dr Johnson on the one hand, or the sound practical calculation of Mr Goldworthy Price, the banker, upon the other, the Mayor was yet possessed of qualities invaluable in an official of his grade—such as open liberality, an inclination to lean all ways, an aversion to say "Nay" to any request, and a disposition to beggar himself if need be; whether for the good of the town or the delights of being in office, need not be gone into. Dr Johnson, Male Adviser in matters of delicacy to Beechester and neighbourhood, described the worthy Mayor as a man who, by his oath of supremacy as well as by his grace of character, was fitly qualified to preside over and govern their aldermen and common council; while his deep reading, cultured mind, and wide understanding, made him pre-eminently the director towards whom a place like Beechester would look for exalted municipal guidance. The Mayor sent him a dozen of wine for that little bit; and Samuel Johnson, LL.D., who was not so well off as he should have been, considering his abilities, made note of the successful speech for the benefit of the next in office. Mr Alderman Dukes had been chosen Mayor of Beechester for the third time; it was confidently mentioned that a statue of their dis-

tinguished townsman would at some period of time grace one of the open places of the city. When any one wished a point settled as to the future, it was customary to refer it to Dr Johnson, who made it all right. Dr Johnson had positively stated to more than one, that Coleman Dukes would have a statue: that was sufficient; it would have taken a bold man to contradict it. The Doctor further explained that he intended to move, that instead of its being placed out of doors, it should stand in the vestibule of their Institute—a proposition which found favour. Another dozen of wine was delivered at the door of the esteemed Doctor. His worship accepted honours quietly; he knew himself to be one of a thousand, and that they were merited: there was no mock modesty about Mr Alderman Dukes, and there was none about Coleman Dukes, Esq., Mayor. Fate might have willed that he should dwell in some other city, unenlightened and illiterate, but it did not; his feelings were spared, he was a member of a community that knew how to appreciate a man like himself. He absorbed dignity, so to say, naturally, and with unaffected amiability, placidly conscious of his own worth and the credit conveyed by the homage of his fellows. Mrs Coleman Dukes could not take things so dispassionately: we are introduced to a lady definitely under process of inflation; try all she would, the Mayoress could not be calm, and her pride developed with her excitement. Perhaps it was too much to expect that the Mayor's lady would manifest the equability of a nobody! At all events she could not, and held it incumbent to maintain in a spirited manner her station and dignity. Mrs Samuel Johnson, Female Adviser in matters of delicacy to Beechester and neighbourhood, entered very fully into her friend's feelings. "The Doctor was only saying yesterday how admirably you bore yourself in the trying position in which, through no will of yours, you find yourself placed, supporting with elegance the station thrust upon you, and becomingly sensible of the dignity necessary!" "Yes, dear," said Mrs Coleman Dukes, with emotion, brushing away a tear or two with the finest of handkerchiefs, specially obtained to aid effect in this part; "I can never tell you of

all I have gone through, and how great a comfort your sympathy is to me under pressure of this trial!" This was not bad, considering Mrs Coleman Dukes had been plotting for the trial, years without number.

Without a doubt the most important person of Beechester neighbourhood, so far as money was concerned, should be mentioned as Goldworthy Price, Esq., the respected owner of Beech Park. A gentleman of expansive intellect and elastic understanding; a little stiff in his manner, certainly, and leaving no room for inferiors to dispute the immeasurable class distinction between the owner of Beech Park and the leading capitalist of Beechester, and individuals of lesser grade. But with all this the graces of intellect and culture distinguishing the banker were so well known and appreciated, that the public would not recognize, and his learned associates would not recognize, any failing of any sort whatsoever. It was as the Male Adviser well put it: "If one man more than another should be free from the invidious calumny of illiterate and utterly incompetent observers, it is a banker; and when to that altogether exceptional calling such eminent gifts are joined, there should be no countenance lent to even a word against him." Several huge bunches of purple grapes from Beech Park! The gardener left them with his master's compliments to Dr Johnson. Mrs Doctor Johnson placed them in a good bold position, where they would operate as a hint to the niggardly. That unfortunate infirmity of the Mayor's was, however, playing the deuce in Beechester; quite innocently he reported the Doctor's remarks in the slightly altered form of—"If one man more than another is an insidious calumniator, an illiterate and utterly incompetent observer, it is the banker; and when to deception appalling to the mind his low countenance is joined, no respectable man should have a word to say to him." And really Dr Johnson began to doubt, after all, whether nature had ever designed his friend Coleman Dukes for a faithful and accurate reporter, whatever might be his qualifications for the office of Mayor.

It is with Beech Park we have more especially to do just

now, for some excitement is astir, and the banker is at his wits' end to know what to do. We will first acquaint the reader with a weakness that troubled this great man in spite of all his greatness, possibly because of it. Mr Goldworthy Price suffered from extreme nervousness. This complaint may be battled with, a very fair compromise be held, so long as the sufferer resides in the town, sandwiched for protection between the houses of his fellows, with only to knock at the wall or call out of the window for immediate assistance; but when the scene is far removed from any habitation, even from the lodge at the gates, it becomes no light matter to a man of wealth and susceptibility. Mr Price had never given this a thought when buying the property, nor for long afterwards; it crept upon him by degrees. He read of such horrid things in the papers; there had been a variety of burglaries round about, and Mr Price never knew how soon his turn might come. It was a thickly-timbered park of large extent, with the rambling old mansion in the centre of it, surrounded by a huge garden flanked by dense plantations. Mr Price always took particular care to arrive home from everywhere before dusk; he would not have crossed the park unattended after nightfall for any money. Terribly did he suffer from the weakness, but he had to keep it to himself, lest it put the idea into anybody's head. No doubt Beech Park was as safe as any other gentleman's demesne; but then, argued the banker with himself, no one is safe—one is continually hearing of shocking robberies. He bitterly regretted ever having left the bank and Beechester, where, if there was inferiority, there was protection; and in a case of emergency this cultured banker would have accepted the services of a being who did not even know his alphabet, so long as he was not afraid to tackle the *genus* housebreaker.

Now this will prepare the reader for surprise and sympathy, certain to be aroused when we explain the cause of the disquieting commotion at the Park.

The establishment of Mr Price consisted of a butler, cook, and two maids: the coachman slept over the stables, some distance in the rear; the gardener lived with his wife at the lodge, and

for all useful purposes might as well have been in Beechester. The coachman, who did not share his master's nervousness, now and then spent the evening in Beechester; and, crossing the park at ten o'clock one night, he saw, as he informed his master in the morning, a strange-looking being step bodily from the hollow trunk of one of the old trees. There was something so weird and out of the common about this, and so suggestive of what he had all along been fearing, that the banker felt all of a cold perspiration, and could scarcely compose himself sufficiently to question his servant concerning the matter. First as to the being's appearance, what did it look like? This the coachman, who like his class generally was graphic when it came to description, proceeded to depict: "A tall and dreadful object, with a green face, and eyes like gig-lamps!" But, questioned closely, he admitted that he had taken a glass or two of ale before leaving Beechester, and was not sure the being had not a bull's-eye lantern. This rather shook the evidence concerning the green face and the gig-lamps; but as the lantern was even more alarming in Mr Price's estimation, and as his man resolutely persisted in his story, it was clear to the banker's mind that there was something in it. They had no firearms on the place; Mr Price had always been so perfectly assured the first person shot would be himself, he preferred to be without. He heartily wished they had a few more bolts and bars at the doors and windows; but he had avoided it, believing nothing was so likely to court the dreaded danger. "And it isn't as though it kept them out," said the sensible estate-holder to himself.

Mr Price looked gravely at his coachman. "This is a very serious thing, because, as you know, this person is poaching—or shall I say trespassing?—and I have never allowed the poor in the park, because I will not have strange characters prowling about after dark. The grounds are strictly private, and this person has no business here whatever—no business. Before taking any steps, I should like you to be on the look-out to-night; endeavour to find out what this means, and ascertain if there are more of them in it."

This commission did not trouble the coachman, who turned

out as requested, and upon the morning following acquainted his master with results. These rather added to the mystery, and certainly increased the banker's anxiety. His coachman solemnly declared as in the presence of a magistrate—so Mr Price desired him—that in quite another part of the park he saw the same being emerge from another of the Beech Park hollow trees, and carefully remove from it some strange-looking implements, which he placed in a black bag. At mention of implements and a black bag the banker shivered.

"Did you observe any lantern last night?"

"Yes, sir; he blew it out and put it in his pocket."

"Did you see the pocket? What was the garb of the singular being you describe? Now speak collectedly, and as though upon your oath; remember this is a very grave matter, most grave, and we do not know where it will end." So saying, Goldworthy Price, Esq., with a profoundly magisterial air, looked piercingly at his coachman, while standing with his right hand open upon his breast, half in and half out of his buttoned-up frock-coat. Mr Price always had a stealthy dread of any one's working upon his fears, and he meant to check back this fellow if he discerned any attempt to frighten him; he entertained a morbid dislike to his inferiors supposing him nervous.

Coachman. "I did not see the pocket, sir. When he stepped from the tree he appeared a lank, deadly-looking customer, wiry——"

"Say sinewy for the future, please." Man touched his forelock, and continued, "And, as I should say, capable of anything, from body-snatching to housebreaking——"

"Stop!" Check! "You have no right to suppose. You may be taking an innocent person's character away. Always be very careful about that. Now—and confine yourself to bare facts—I only want what you *did* see."

Forelock, a downward reflective look, and, "A long black cloak, sir, was down by the side of the tree. He slipped it on him, and, gathering up his bag, strode off, and was lost to sight in the wood." If the banker hated mention of any nocturnal properties, next to a black mask, a long black cloak certainly ranked first.

"But why did you not follow it?"

"I tried, sir, but the trees are so thick together the moonlight doesn't go through 'em; and I couldn't see my own way, let alone his."

"That will do."

There was a lightness and want of sympathy with the occasion about the man's last remark very displeasing to the banker, who curtly dismissed him, and sat down to ruminate. There only appeared to be one course—the usual Beechester course,—to call in Dr Johnson. He despatched a note to that eminent man, and joined his guests then staying at the Park. Mr Price never quite discovered how or why there staying, but accepted the fact as inevitable; certainly they made two more in the house at night!

They were two ladies, known respectively as Miss Cramp and Miss Cramp's mamma. Strangers and the vulgar pretended to forget always which was Miss Cramp and which the Mamma. Mere spite, and because they were not also guests at the Park! Certainly Miss Cramp took the precedence; but then she was a woman of spirit and action, and quite determined that neither herself nor her mamma should be trampled on. The forty odd years that had graced this agile lady's experience had not come and gone for nothing; and she would have you to know that in dealing with herself and her mamma you dealt with no ordinary folk. They descended quite suddenly upon the poor banker—almost took his breath away—and before he could turn round, were settled at Beech Park for a good six months or more. "We were the best friends your dear and sainted mother ever had, and we mean to be your best friends. It is wrong to live so much alone, Goldworthy—unjust to one's very self. We felt the mission strong upon us to try and save you from this, and at a great sacrifice we have left Bath to do so. We have let our house for some months purposely to try and cheer you up. 'Never lose sight of Goldworthy,' implored your darling mother; 'and if you ever find him lonely and forsaken, go to him with your gentle ministry, your self-sacrificing devotion, for my sake, and be all to him that you have been to me.'" It was Miss

Cramp who delivered this dramatic introduction, with poignant emotion, her mamma increasing the effect by going off into violent hysterics—all before they had been in the house ten minutes. The owner of Beech Park, disconcerted and much put out—for he hated any affair of the kind—felt utterly unable to grapple with this Amazonian friend of his mother, and retreated for a while. When he returned, Miss Cramp and Miss Cramp's mamma were perfectly at home, composed and settled; and without a scene—from which Mr Price shrank aghast—it would be impossible to eject them. Of course Dr Johnson heard of their arrival immediately, and called to have a look at them. There was something about the younger lady he did not admire. She reminded him of a trooper; but he was immensely polite, and Miss Cramp's mamma pronounced him "a thorough courtier." "I don't know," said Miss Cramp, with a suspicious and lowering cast. "I fear—you know I am never uncharitable—I fear there is something designing about the man." It got about next day that the wealthy banker was dangerously ill, and no end of cards were left; even the Bishop called—a most Christian attention. Of course their esteemed Mayor was at the bottom of the unfounded rumour. He had overheard Dr Johnson speaking with much animation of the banker, coupled with the word "cramp," several times repeated, and at once set it down as cramp in the stomach. And this it was that seriously alarmed Beechester. Dr Johnson walked over to Beech Park at once upon receipt of the banker's message.

"I want to ask your advice in a most complicated matter," commenced Mr Price, when they were seated and quite private. The Doctor bowed with tremendous gravity. "An extraordinary being has turned up in the park; frequents the hollow trees; is seen only at night; sometimes with a lantern, and, my man declares, moves a bag of implements about with him; what are you to make out of this?"

The Doctor cast his eyes upward with a long, silent, sagaciously penetrative manner, and then said softly, scarcely above a whisper, "This is very like Herne the Hunter; did your man discover horns?"

This was a new view of it; even the timid banker had not touched upon the supernatural. The Doctor spoke again. "It may be one of three things: a lunatic botanist" (if Mr Price was afraid of one thing on earth more than another, to come in contact with, it was a lunatic! Altogether the Adviser was not improving the situation); "the scout of a gang of burglars" (Mr Price caught at the arms of his easy-chair, and looked at the speaker in blank dismay); "or an apparition, warning you of approaching calamity." (The banker's head sank, he drew up his arms convulsively, tried next to shake it off, and listened eagerly for the Doctor's further remark.) "I advise a select commission to inquire into this — privately, of course, and on any night agreeable to yourself. I am prepared to take the initiative; and I propose, if you are willing, to call upon Jonadab Sneezer for my lieutenant. You know his devotion to science, his unimpeachable integrity, his untainted piety. I am sure he will join me in this delicate, I had almost said distressing elucidation."

"I don't object to Sneezer," grumbled the banker; "it's his sister, a most awful being!"

"My dear Mr Price," laughed Dr Johnson, "this is prejudice, from not knowing Miss Jochebed; one of the most discriminating women of the century; of advanced opinions, perhaps, but unusual grasp of intellect. Steadily resisting the attempt to confine female judgment, she has won a great victory for her sex. You may be sure *I* should not give her efforts countenance if I was not thoroughly satisfied that she is an altogether exceptional person."

"And so she ought to be," muttered the banker. "Would you credit, the last time she called at the bank she walked behind and examined the books, notwithstanding vigorous protest on the part of my clerks? I was not there, fortunately for her."

"I admit Miss Sneezer to be eccentric; but then I believe her actions to be regulated by a large heart, by acute impressions, by mental faculties of an unprecedented order. She is one with her brother; they work in unison. With chivalry I admire, he confesses her understanding to be equal to his own

You are aware they are our foremost patrons of science and scientific enlightenment. Beechester is certainly indebted to Jochebed and Jonadab Sneezer; and you know they brought money into the town. Had they been a pair of paltry adventurers it would have been a very different thing."

"It certainly does make a difference," assented the banker, thoughtfully.

"Again, Miss Jochebed has had to fight her way through much persecution; her sex has been dead against her, jealous of her superior intellectual powers. I am always upon the side of the weak. I consider the endurance and devotion shown by Miss Jochebed and her brother absolutely without a parallel: they lead sublime lives, individually, unitedly!"

"I understand they are generally spoken of as 'the sublime couple;' is that in sarcasm or ignorant admiration?"

"It is a designation applied by myself, I may say almost unconsciously, upon an occasion when we were discussing the noble and illustrious worthies who make our city without its equal in the empire. Our city endorsed the term then used, accepted it without reserve: the life led by our friends had long been viewed with enthusiasm; no description could better convey the exalted nature of their character—they will always be known as simply sublime!"

"Very well, Doctor, we won't fall out about that. I suppose I am to take it for granted if the man comes the woman accompanies him?"

"If you prefer to put it with that brevity, sir."

"I ask, because I would rather not receive Miss Sneezer. However, a lady now staying in my house—you know her, Miss Cramp—will perform the necessary duties. Whom else do you intend to join you in this enterprise?"

"I do not see that we need any one else; the Sneezers are a host in themselves. Depend on it we shall arrive at a solution—satisfactory, I hope, to you and ourselves. And now, which night will be convenient to yourself? You will of course accompany the expedition?"

"I think not; the long grass and mist—I am afraid I must give up all idea of it; you can have my coachman."

"No, thanks; he might startle the game. We must observe closely and at leisure to deduce any practical evidence. To-night, do you think?"

"I think so."

"Nothing like taking the vampire red-handed," said the Doctor, jocosely; and the great man addressed, quietly shuddered at such levity.

The Doctor withdrew. In the interim Mr Price informed his visitors of what was going on.

"But why did you not come to us first, Goldworthy?" cried Miss Cramp; "there would then have been no need to have in all these odd people. Of course it is no business of mine, but it strikes one as in the light of an inroad, an encroachment, unpleasant altogether. I should have been proud to sally forth unattended—the only modest course, I think, for a young female in the dead of the night; and I would have compelled this depredator to furnish an explanation of his conduct. Your friend the Doctor's arguments are palpably absurd, and seem to me designed to work upon your feelings."

"Do you think so?" interrupted the banker, almost savagely; "but that isn't a right line for a man in his position. Why, he directs social and domestic thought in Beechester!"

"Does he, now?" and with frigid curiosity Miss Cramp put on her glasses and stared hard and wonderingly at the banker. Miss Cramp's mamma idly murmured, "Dear me!" and likewise put on her glasses, staring hard and wonderingly at this lonely and forsaken man of wealth.

At about half-past nine that evening the party arrived. They were received by Miss Cramp in the dining-room, and the ladies took quick inspection of one another. Miss Cramp saw a tall angular female, advanced in years, ungainly of movement, but with an obstinate assurance of utterly unbending and unyielding type; a long thin face of ghastly sallowness, high cheek-bones, high forehead, iron-grey hair forming another tier above the forehead; at the summit of the hair was a bonnet which might have been nailed or riveted or otherwise fitted thereon by an ironmonger or bell-hanger: altogether it was an impressive exterior, and not to be trifled with

—Minerva-like and massive, with an odour of sanctity and ripe moral excellence, and an implied devotion to any cause calculated to advance scientific progress. A thick pilot-jacket, and a thick warm skirt, unusually short for so long a person, completed her gear, and Miss Cramp, who aspired to be in the fashion, was anything but prepossessed therewith. Jochebed Sneezer walked with a stick—unkind people said to keep the little boys off: really it was useful when she went grubbing about the lanes for specimens, or when crossing the fields she met cows; she was not afraid of the cows, but liked to be prepared for a fight.

Miss Sneezer, on her side, saw a tall muscular lady, of breadth and strength, of raw red strength, that was in itself an aggression in the eyes of the sallow and learned lady; such raw red strength betokened smallness of brain, a deficiency not atoned for by any amount of the muscular and the florid. Miss Cramp prided herself upon her countenance, loved to think that the world might see there was no hypocrisy in it, that the world might read the blunt old-fashioned honesty and purpose in it, and her colour she would comfortably feel to be the standard there planted in right of her pure life, early hours, and abstemious habits.

But by far the most noticeable person of this group of four was Jonadab himself, and this worthy once seen could never be forgotten. All the graces of sanctimoniousness met in his long solemn self, blended with the most profound airs of learning ever assumed by the most impudent of charlatans. Of a similar unwholesome hue, his countenance was an exact counterpart of that of the erudite Jochebed. The attached pair were models of family fondness, they perambulated arm in arm, affectionately kissed each other on the cheek at systematic intervals, exchanged long prayers for each other's welfare, and studied in company with touching dependence upon each other's store of learning. The little boys aforenamed had it that the pair lived upon black beetles and old book-covers,—a repulsive method of accounting for their grim unnatural faces, and thin wasted bodies; they might indeed have passed the earlier portion of their lives upon the rack. But with all the eccentric characteristics, Mr Jonadab was as full of old-woman-

ish affectation as a Lord Chief-Justice, and as redolent of mock humility as was consistent with the preservation of dignity.

The sublime couple introduced by Dr Johnson, stood within the banker's dining-room, under eye and ear of an uneducated feminine interloper, so they regarded her; but putting small personal matters aside, this was an occasion not to be lost. Mr Jonadab kicked a hassock to the end of the dining-room table, mounted it, and throwing up his right arm, with a long grisly hand at the end of it, addressed the meeting: "Christian and dear friends, we are met to-night under circumstances of what I may call stupendous import, fraught with solemn issues, influencing the happiness of one of our chief citizens. The inquiry about to be held is imperative! No landowner is to be molested and annoyed in this way. A strict, stern examination of the circumstances, an attempt to unravel the cause, is the purpose bringing us here to-night. We deeply feel for Mr Price; he has our warmest sympathy. I have great pleasure in seconding Dr Johnson in this grave matter." The speaker leaned forward solemnly, and solemnly shook hands with the learned Doctor across the table; then he came off the hassock, approached his sister with visible emotion, and said, "You will accompany us, Jochebed?"

"I will." It was the most sepulchral voice Miss Cramp thought she had ever heard, and furthermore thought, from what she had gleaned of the strange apparition in the park, that this weird pair and it, would be all of a party; nevertheless Miss Cramp determined upon accompanying the expedition.

It has been explained that there were no firearms on the premises. Miss Cramp surmounted this difficulty and promoted the safety of the devoted band by having in impromptu weapons. To Mr Jonadab was apportioned an enormous flail; at his first movement with this the irresponsible end came in violent wooden contact with the head of the saintly Jochebed, who reared, looked inclined to swear, then sat very erect and prayed audibly. The offender went over to her, kissed her upon the cheek, while making frantic efforts to keep quiet the bit of wood dangling over his shoulder and bumping about

threateningly, and then with deep meaning he said, "What blessings in disguise await us at every turn!" The Doctor avoided one of these blessings by standing in the doorway; he thought it the safest place, especially when Miss Cramp handed Minerva a pitchfork; he loved his friends much, but thought their sublimity more confirmed when unarmed. Miss Cramp herself reserved a pickaxe which she wielded with some nerve leaving no doubt of its execution, given occasion. For the Doctor there was left a huge hedge-stake, and the honour of lighting the party,—the stable lantern being brought into service for the purpose. Jonadab and Jochebed Sneezer suddenly lifted up their voices in song, rendering a verse of some appropriate hymn with feeling. Then the party set forth. A light was at the banker's bedroom window; he had locked, bolted, and barricaded himself in; there might be a siege while the enemy's strongholds were attacked.

The party proceeded after a scattered fashion, for Miss Jochebed was afraid of the flail, of which her adorable brother no more understood the management out of doors, than in. Miss Cramp was not fond enough of any of the company to go very close to them. Dr Johnson was busy humouring first his stake and next his lantern; and Mr Jonadab walked in rapt ecstasy devoutly admiring the wonders in the heavens. Suddenly a piercing scream curdled their blood; it was Miss Jochebed, who had slipped down a rabbit-burrow, and who fancied "the being" was pulling at her ancle. The banker heard it in his retreat, and groaning, "They've got him!" covered his ears and sat shaking, with his eyes watching his bedroom door.

Dr Johnson's lantern was of but very little use for lighting their path; indeed its glimmer bewildered them, and made the darkness more dense. Very massive looked the black tree-trunks, while their foliage hung thick and sullen as a pall. Oppressive doubts as to the result of their quest weighed upon each enthusiast. The house seemed a tremendous distance off. How silent were their footsteps on the grass! They advanced like a body of spectres. It was uncanny work—each felt it so; but not one dared express the feeling. They were silent, each busy with his or her

thoughts, each thinking a very stupid mistake had been perpetrated. They had no business there when all Beechester was in bed. They stepped with caution amidst the trees, prepared for whatever might suddenly start up in their path. Of course each hollow trunk was approached and walked round in a hesitating, uncertain manner, indicative of the points of surprise. Mr Jonadab's weapon knocked against the trees with such scaring thuds, that he shifted it, and bore it before him. The result of this was a disconcerting commotion. The loose end of the flail having entangled itself in Mr Jonadab's legs, his sublimity was shortly upon the sward. He sat up, stared, owl-like and meek, and began to sing a portion of another hymn. Suddenly, however, this tuneful resignation came to an abrupt termination. The spot of the accident was very near to the largest of all those hollow trees so often mentioned. He was not aware of this until it was, by one swift flash, illuminated from within. Its circular recess was lighted up in vivid relief against the surrounding darkness; and in the midst (the same light revealing his preternaturally strange outline and dismal expression of countenance) there appeared the object of their search. And Jonadab Sneezer wished himself upon his legs, for the entire party had taken to theirs at sight of that fearful figure. He saw the Doctor's lantern bobbing about in the distance like a Will-o'-the-wisp, a great way off. The brave daughters of the regiment lost no time in fleeing after that darting flame. The long-headed Jonadab was left in the lurch; and he had not yet found out which of the pieces belonged to his legs and which to the flail. He experienced the necessity of uttering some few sacred preservative words to exorcise the demon. He had forgotten everything except the grace before meat — he reverently repeated, "For what we are about to receive may we be duly thankful!" Apparently the words were heard by the figure, for a look of blank surprise animated its solemn face. Immediately afterwards the light was extinguished or hidden. There was sound of knocking together of iron implements, as though a retreat was intended. Jonadab paid no attention to this; but, gathering himself together, and apportioning his

members to their several uses, he, with solemnity and sorrow, betook himself off. That he should have been deserted in that craven fashion at the very moment of attacking the evil spirit with the flail (he selected this version for the historic) so grieved him, that no other consolation remained than recalling the wise words of the ancients, interspersed with passages of Scripture.

The Beech Park mystery, as it was called, soon became widely canvassed in Beechester. The solution of the affair will be explained indirectly in the next chapter. The great people of Beechester never got to the bottom of it. The sublime couple became, for the nonce, eminent and distinguished. Dr Johnson, naturally, was in great request; but the lion for nine days was undoubtedly his friend Jonadab. Had the Sneezers' reputation for veracity not been over and over established and confirmed, the awful narration by Jonadab would have been questioned; but it is one of the advantages and one of the rewards of unimpeachable character and truly pious consistence of conduct that words are accepted literally —and only very low and wicked people venture to put any other construction upon them. Of course there always will be such people, and you cannot alter them; constitutionally incredulous, they warp the delicacy of saintliness and learning by blunt disbelief. Such flourished in Beechester at this time; and emphatically their leader was that vulgarian and Goth, Sir Toodleum. He obstinately declared it his opinion that the whole story was an invention to draw attention to a swindling crew who ought to be on the treadmill. This plain language caused some consternation. Sir Toodleum was not upon the educated and cultured side of Beechester, and he took care to let Beechester know he was very glad of it; for in his opinion, those who knew a lot were humbugs, and those who knew a little, fools. It was deemed expedient to let Sir Toodleum alone after that. You cannot eradicate vulgarity and ignorance, and no good can come of a collision. To Goldworthy Price, Esq., who abhorred publicity, it was matter of regret that the services of Jonadab and Jochebed had ever been called into requisition.

CHAPTER XXX.

MR FIGG'S FEAST.

GALA-DAY at the office of Boggis and Blim, where Mr Timothy Figg, arrayed in a bright lemon-coloured scarf, buff waistcoat, straw hat with orange ribbon, and other sumptuous apparel, sat on his high stool busily occupied in tapping a cocoa-nut. Mr Figg was expecting a visitor, and had prepared the feast beforehand. A pennyworth of scrubby-looking apples, some not over-clean confection, a bottle of ginger-beer, a tartlet—upon which Mr Figg had had the misfortune to sit, thus annulling its shapely puffiness—and some sherbet screwed up in newspaper, constituted the liberality upon the occasion: the chief clerk did not do the thing by halves when expecting the guest in question. He usually availed himself of the safe absence from London of his superiors, and of a dull day, to hold a reception; but the day described was out of the common, it was a downright gala-day. All the morning his diligence had been increased, and would have astonished, more than it would have pleased, Messrs Boggis and Blim, since it took the direction of proceeding with his careful study of land-surveying and the rest, as illustrated by the private papers of those gentlemen. Mr Figg was an original of the first water, and unsophisticated as a cray-fish; his docile know-nothingness had again and again provoked their admiration; at times they even felt that if taken into their confidence he would be as innocently safe as a post. His great vacant eyes were open wide with unconsciousness of deception, his flat expressionless face conveyed blank indifference to any interest in life beyond serving his masters with dog-like faithful obedience; and they thoroughly

believed in Timothy Figg—rather more than Timothy Figg believed in them.

Mr Figg's shiny, straw-coloured skin, and scanty, straw-coloured hair, had been severally polished and brushed for this occasion; his toilet operations were performed with the cuffs of his jacket and a bunch of quill-pens. Thus renovated and accoutred, as described, he presented an indefinite, tintless picture, being without outline. The sun did not shine in at Boggis and Blim's—it looked upon a piece of the passage and did not like it and went no further; had it done so, it would have taken no silhouette of Timothy Figg—that obscure individual was too neutrally shaded to cast a shadow.

Boggis and Blim believed their clerk's age to be of something under twenty, precisely what, it would have been difficult to surmise, that vacancy hiding his years behind it. When they engaged with him, upon asking the question he could only reply he had forgotten his age; they did not take any particular interest in it, and the matter passed,—enough that he looked the creature to suit. It was when alone, applying himself to the gaining of useful information, that the uncertain face took on an aged look, and the pale, hueless eyes scrutinized piercingly.

Mr Figg had with a gimlet performed the operation upon the cocoa-nut, and was filling a glass with the milk, while the delight of a connoisseur beamed upon his face at the quantity obtained, when the door bearing OFFICE upon it was rapped at with a bony knuckle, and a piping voice inquired, "Is you at home, Mr Figg?" To which Timothy replied, "Yes, Jemima, and waiting for you."

Whereupon Jemima entered; a bony Jemima, odoriferous of oil, and garnished in high colour.

"Lawk, Mr Figg, what a spread you'se got!" And the young maiden stood overwhelmed before the hospitality rampant.

This Jemima Tottles bore down upon the office of Boggis and Blim from a neighbouring court, where her mother dealt in fish, fried and in the raw. Mrs Tottles was not a genteel woman, and was noted for her severe usage of the young

person whose visit to Mr Figg we describe. At the corner of the court was a tavern, and thither Mrs Tottles resorted more frequently than was good for her manners. It was after a fierce chastisement following upon her mother's return from this tavern that Timothy Figg first saw his young lady, sitting upon a doorstep and howling lustily. Such bewailing with *espressivo*, quite touched the clerk's compassion, and he stopped to inquire concerning it, when the lamentation proceeded with redoubled ardour. Eventually Mr Figg quieted the girl, who was really smarting from the infliction of most brutal blows; he bought her an orange, talked more kindly than did those of her court, and the friendship sprang up, the anniversary of which Miss Tottles now called to celebrate.

"I'm glad to see you, Jemima; I've got all my work done, and I'll close up in a quarter of an hour. There'll be nobody come along now, and then we'll have some tea at the coffee-shop and go off to the theatre."

Jemima looked delighted by the arrangement, and took off her hat. She was not a bad-looking girl when the gaudy piece of millinery was removed. The roughness from exposure to all weathers, inseparable from the appearance of the lads and lasses of London courts, produced a healthiness upon the face in direct contrast to the unwholesome hue of Mr Figg; bony she was, and thin and tall, but this communicated agile activity that was also the opposite of Timothy's sluggish action.

"What a beautiful place this is!" said Jemima, looking around admiringly. "I say, what great people your masters must be!"

"They are clever," answered the clerk, dryly. "And now, what'll you have, Jemima?"

"It all looks so splendid, I don't know which to say."

"Try a bit of the cocoa-nut," advised Timothy, greatly pleased at the success of his festival.

"I certainly do like cocoa-nut,—it's lovely."

"If we should ever have money enough to be married, we'd sit and eat 'em all day long, eh, Jemima?" In spite of this pointed remark the clerk's eyes and face wore the customary expressionless aspect, nor did his companion manifest any

extra interest, beyond explaining, "And whelks is wonderful nice too!"

"What's become of your mother? I was afraid perhaps you wouldn't get out."

"She's asleep; bin up to th' *Friend o' Man* for her afternoon's dram, and met with Mrs Muggins; then they got sitting down a-talking of their troubles and drinking to a end on 'em, and when my mother come in, she laid down and went to sleep. She never wakes till eleven or twelve o'clock, so I shut up and come on to you."

"That's all right as far as it goes, but I'm jolly glad I ain't got a mother!" The girl nodded.

"When I can get a place, I mean to go to service; but the folks looks suspicious like on a gal as has no friends nor recommendation."

"I'll help you, Jemima, if I can. It won't do no hurt for a year or so, and afterwards we'll have some money perhaps, and—what's that? Somebody at the front door, and coming in! Creep into that cupboard—he won't stop long, whoever it is; somebody on business."

The girl did as required; the client entered the room where Mr Figg had hastily covered the regalement, and laid his hat aside.

It was a solemn-looking person who entered, wearing a great white cravat, a long black coat several sizes too large, and carrying a soft felt hat, also black and of capacious size, and an umbrella, the fastening of which was loose, thus permitting a baggy fulness to its lower part. The person was dressed in black clothes, and wore black cotton gloves long and limp in the fingers—Figg believed it was the Tract Distributor of the district. The clerk had not spoken nor made any indication, but the person sat down, saying, "I thank you, young man!"

Mr Figg waited with some curiosity, while writing down some figures to appear occupied; this might be one come to spy upon the milk and honey of that land.

"Are your employers in the way?"

"No, sir, absent upon business; I am here to take down in writing all instructions, which I forward by each night's post."

"An industrious and valuable assistant, I can see; I much admire such praiseworthy attention."—PAGE 311.

"An industrious and valuable assistant I can see; I much admire such praiseworthy attention. System, young man, is everything in business. I ask your acceptance of this half-crown as a token of my appreciation of your merits. Your employers ought to reward you generously—I suppose they do; very nice people, from all I have heard. And what part of the world may they be in now—when will a letter reach them?"

"To-morrow morning. They are at Ipswich!"

"Yes, and a very nice part too; and the postal service is very regular about that part. I expect you do a great business here, and your time is fully occupied?"

"Generally pretty busy in one way and another."

"Yes, and a very nice place you have here—very. I take a great interest in the wellbeing of young men like yourself. Don't smoke, I hope?"

"No, I don't smoke."

"I admire your conduct more and more. Live in the house?"

"I take charge of the premises, night as well as day."

"And very nice; upon my word an excellent start for you! Pretty comfortable in the house?"

"As much so as anybody can be when they're all to themselves."

"I take great interest in you, my young friend—great interest. We have a Breakfast once a-month; you must come to our Breakfast. I should like to see the household arrangements here. I'll go over the house."

Without waiting to be conducted or accompanied, the man in the long coat proceeded to go over the house. The flaccid Mr Figg joined him, surprised rather by the coolness of the person, while the scrutinizing way in which he dived into odd corners and routed out the old rubbish impressed the clerk considerably,—he was evidently a sanitary reformer of the active type.

"Want's the charwoman here. Of course you can't attend to your office duties and be doing the house-cleaning; but everything is very nice, upon my word, considering! Didn't I see a queer-looking stick up-stairs,—black man's head or

something in that way; was it here, or in one of the other houses?" They were at the foot of the dirty stairs; he had fixed the sallow one with the light from over the passage-door full upon him, and when the question was asked abruptly and as though upon the spur of the moment, his keen eyes studied Mr Figg's face searchingly: nothing could have less repaid the process, all was void and vacant, not a glimmer of emotion or interest.

"It wasn't here."

"No more it was; I remember now, at quite another part—and very nice too, curiously carved. I take an interest in old sticks; I've got a collection of my own, and when people won't sell to me, I never mind paying for being allowed to make a sketch. For instance, suppose your master had got a funny old stick—the more curious the better—and you could bring it over to my place one evening, say for an hour, there'd be five shillings for yourself; I could make a drawing of it, and he need be none the wiser. I admire your system of doing things so much, I am sure you would do that very nicely. Here's my address, my young friend, in case you ever have the opportunity, and really in this world we never know what good fortune we may be upon the brink of; and it's very nice, it is, living in such a world, we might, you know, have been placed in one where there could never be any chance of distinguishing one's self, but here the very meanest amongst us may occasionally be in luck's way."

While thus discoursing solemnly, and as instructing Timothy for his good, he placed in his hand an envelope of an old letter addressed to

Mr Ranger,

19 Wormwood Street.

The clerk placed it in his pocket, and hoped the singular gentleman would now take his departure.

"Perhaps it will be better for me to call again at some future time in respect to Messrs Boggis and Blim, instead of troubling you to write. My business is in no hurry what-

ever; and-er-you need not say I called, or they may blame you for not pressing me to communicate it in writing; and very nice too, admirably managed. I consider you of great service to your employers, and I shall be happy to see you again. Good day; and I wish you success in life young man, every success."

With that he departed down the street, and showing up against dingy houses in the dim light he looked more strange still. He walked on, then took the 'bus to Wormwood Street, and entered at No. 19, where he rented two down-stairs rooms. Tea was set, and upon ringing the bell his teapot was brought up, with some dry toast. He took his tea alone; he was very much alone always, with one big bosom project that absorbed all his attention. In his purse, which went under his pillow at night, there was a piece of old card. It had, originally, been one of the caricature stock-jobbing bubble cards, of which many were in circulation about the year 1720, but are now very rare—one of a pack called the South Sea playing-cards, at that time provocative of much derision. In one corner was a black spade, in the body of the card was represented the hollow trunk of a tree, and a figure hiding bags of treasure; leaning against the tree were quaintly-drawn sticks, with grotesque heads black as the spade. The whole thing was a rude caricature; it seemed to have been torn up at some time or other. Upon the larger remaining half were two marks, apparently made hurriedly with a sharp thumb-nail; they were distinct, and possibly of meaning: one was against the most grotesque of the sticks, the other upon the trunk of the tree. The owner took it from his purse and looked at it closely, as he had looked at it some hundreds of times before, and he hissed to himself softly, as some serpent would preparing to strike: "Yes, it's plain as a pike-staff; either that the Treasure is buried in some tree, or that the key to its hiding-place is cleverly deposited in one of these old-fashioned sticks: and since I've seen space enough to hold a will rolled up, it's no way unreasonable to believe it; and very nice too; I admire the old merchant's precaution. If ever there was a deep one, that one was Saul Weir; but I think he has found

his match in Ralph Ranger. And I've made acquaintance with pretty nearly all the odd cudgels in Britain. I was close on securing a beauty in Ipswich, an uncommonly fine specimen, and ugly enough to be the right; just lost it by a rap. Went on a little further, intending to return, and had the pleasure of seeing it carried off by this party. Managed to get his address, though no chance of securing a handling of the stick there, for he walks with it, and walks a good deal. Expected him home before this, or shouldn't have called at their office just yet; but that fool is sure to bring it on, and then, Mr Ranger, your Old Curiosity and Herne the Hunter business will possibly be advanced. We shall see!"

Mr Ranger usually had a little quiet talk with himself over his tea, and it always amounted to about the same thing: how nice everything was; how deep the old miser had been; and how cleverly he, Ranger, was going to prove more than his match! Certainly if diligence meets with its reward the man should succeed. Personally he had made acquaintance with every hollow tree of the sixty-eight forests, eighteen chases, and seven hundred and eighty parks of England; had dared perils, ran hairbreadth escapes, been within an inch of man-traps and keepers' guns, nearly broken his neck scaling walls and high palings, and tumbled within an ace of the policeman's truncheon; had scratched the solemn face with brambles, torn the undertaker suit with nails, and nearly frightened to death poor cottagers stealing wood, who took him for the devil! His moonlight trespassing, and sorry plights when there was no moon; his disregard of weather and obstacles of all sorts; his endurance and indomitable energy; his loneliness and solitude, for he performed his research entirely alone, —all would make a book of itself; his mannerism, gravity, and cunning, all bring before us a being of most singular and sharply-defined characteristics. The man originally had been the underpaid and slighted secretary of an illiterate baronet of "horsey" tastes, turf-squandered means, stable associates, and ill-defined perceptions of honour. All his life Mr Secretary Ranger had his eyes about him, and it was in the service of this gentleman that he gained his information of the Trea-

sure. It had come down in the baronet's family, and was a stock after-dinner anecdote; but the secretary's keen eyes saw further, and his sinuous curling hands, always clawing at odd relics buried deep in great chests and drawers, one day turned up some cards, and one torn. The piece was marked in two places, and those marks from that time sealed Ralph Ranger's future course. With a greedy sense of delighted wonder he felt satisfied the key to the real truth was in his possession. The miser had hidden, in his old staff, the directions relating to the huge Treasure, which had for monument some large-girthed monarch of our woodlands. To be certain, Ralph Ranger from that time devoted himself to continual research; old curiosity shops were routed out and museums visited for their sticks, while the woods were explored and historic timber systematically made chart and note of for their hollow trunks. This was a work of years, a labour of patience; conducted without hurry, with the gravity natural to the individual. He was convinced nobody but himself knew of the key to it, whatever others might know of the Treasure; but even the latter he had always found to be regarded by most people as a myth. Had Mr Ranger known that the old miser, under a temporary aberration of intellect, placed more than one clue upon record, he would probably, long since, have given up the game to the unknown partners, for he was too cautious and careful a man to waste time upon a project of doubtful issue. This did not appear in any sense doubtful, it was simply a matter of time: a lot of ground had to be gone over, a certain work to be done on the ground; hollow trees and nigger-headed sticks were not as plentiful as blackberries; he should do it, given the time —and it was all very nice!

He had done it, so far as the greater part of England was concerned: he began at the top and worked downwards, and at last had but the East to operate upon. He was glad: believed in the East, looked to it, drank the health of the great golden sun in coffee each day before commencing, and pleasantly likened himself to the Wise Men, historically of the East. Suffolk and Essex alone remained to be gone over, and with drawing in of the lines the explorer picked up wonderfully;

when those great tracts, Windsor Forest, the Forest of Dean, and above all the New Forest, where outstretched with gloomy sublimity, holding possibly in some far-off shadowy aisle the riches of that vast collection, the task was apparently interminable. But months and years saw the end to it, and the gradual circumscribing of the space, until but two counties awaited investigation, and the traveller shaking himself, much gratified, yet swearing because he did not begin at that end first, pronounced the arrangement very nice.

He made Ipswich his headquarters, and, as was his recreative method, diversified the green lands with back lanes and narrow streets of the town. And thus came about his finding the identical old stick which originally belonged to the cause of all the commotion we are describing. He did not know of that same circumstance, or it is positively certain he would not have gone on those few yards which lost him the stick. To ascertain the owner's status and place of abode was the object of his immediate attention, and this was learnt without difficulty, for Mr Blim was far too open-dealing an individual to envelop himself or his firm in unnecessary mystery. The next day Mr Ranger turned up at the lodgings he occupied when in the metropolis, taken in the street called Wormwood, by choice, bearing a good omen along with its enlivening title, according to his view of it. From there he proceeded to study Boggis and Blim's from the outside; and the day afterwards, Mr Timothy Figg's anniversary day, presented himself as afore recorded, on the inside, whither we return, to find Miss Tottles released, Mr Figg shutting up, and all in readiness for the evening's pleasure.

The lightness and manifest eagerness to be off, displayed by Timothy, would lead us to believe that, in spite of the apathy at all times characterising him, he really did participate in some of those feelings which animate other people.

No particular effect was produced on his mind by the visit of that eccentric stranger, it was regarded as in the ordinary course of business, with the addition of some little peculiarity; but Mr Figg having lived in London all his life, was not wholly unacquainted with the peculiar.

Miss Tottles put on her florid head-gear, Mr Figg donned his straw and orange, and carefully locking, first the office and next the house doors, they turned their backs on Boggis and Blim's.

When they came to the main road it took them some few minutes to decide between the respective attractions of the different coffee-shops. They at last paused, much prepossessed before a window of dusty attractiveness, where eggs in egg-cups, rolls, pats of butter, and lumps of cake, seemed to indicate solid and substantial fare. The flies were thick as currants, Miss Tottles did not object to flies, they lived upon so many sweet things she regarded them in some sort as confection of themselves. The place was dirtier and more crowded than its fellows, this also they approved. The true London poor are attached to their London dirt and crowd, and if a clean and roomy place be at their service a few doors beyond, they will still patronise the most crowded and dirty place to be found. The cleaner sort of shops are supported by those country born and bred, those who loathe the grimy interiors upon which more humble London essentially prides itself.

Enough that the pair was satisfied—that Jemima was unable to restrain her enthusiasm, and exclaimed, "Shouldn't I like to come here to tea every evening! Goodness, Mr Figg, how a body who's got money may enjoy life!" To which her friend rather sententiously, and as became a young man in his position, replied: "Enjoyment rather depends upon being content with so much as one has, and making the best of it." Miss Tottles looked with admiration at the speaker, impressed, as she had often been before, by his reflections. There was great clattering of cups and saucers, and much activity amongst the company, who evidently were acting upon Mr Figg's basis. At the end of the retreat, dingy red curtains drawn before the culinary preparations veiled mysteries of human ingenuity, which might have drawn forth another profound remark from the thoughtful Mr Figg; but where ignorance is contentment, why risk our happiness by being wise? The tea was hurried over, as they wished to be in good time for the theatre.

where Timothy promised his companion a seat in the very front row of the gallery.

"I think if I was the Queen I'd spend all my time riding about in a hansom cab,—it must be splendid!" Their lightness, as they passed, aroused the girl's excited eagerness and she looked after them with longing eyes; great, therefore, was her delight when Mr Figg hailed one, for the express purpose of giving her pleasure. In this state they drove to the theatre, Jemima talking but little; the enjoyment was of that nature when not a breath of its preciousness can be spared: but when afterwards, with thin soles on the hard pavement, came the return to reality, the girl gasped, "Oh, Mr Figg, I am so grateful to you for that! I hoped some day to ride in one o' them more than for anything!"—it pleased her companion much. Miserable waifs, this friendship helped them on. It is more to the poor than to those above them, because it is genuine,— because they have little else to bring comfort,—because it supplies the place of that bulwark of their betters—learning.

A busy unwashed throng, for the most part juveniles, stood just by the muddy entrance to the gallery; they were in some commotion, owing to one of their number having seen the play before, and upon the merits of which he was pleased to expatiate. "What's yer about, can't yer? Where er yer shoving to?" as Mr Figg and lady made room for themselves. Opposite was a wall covered with posters. These are veritable wells of information to the London poor, many of whom have learnt to read by them and no other book; and rude as are the specimens of art thereon, we have known instances where they have fostered a taste, the germ of the desire for self-improvement and rising in life. Timothy was anxious that the future Mrs Figg should know how to read and how to boil a potato—all the rest might go. The first, Miss Tottles had learnt of him when out walking, by means of these hoardings and advertisement stations; and now while they were waiting he asked her to read them down. And she did so with a fluency that proved her the apt pupil she was. Near by was a coal-shed. A lady of uncertain colour emerged from behind a sack

of coals, and threateningly approached Mr Figg. She insisted upon knowing what he had been knocking her boy about for. That gentleman's neutrality was never in better form, and might have passed for presence of mind. He mildly explained that there was a mistake. "Beg parding," said the good woman; "I tuk yer for th' schulemaster." Thus does one's apparent vocation impress the immediate public. Next door to the theatre was an establishment displaying dog-collars, sweets, small-tooth combs, sausages, milk, dates, tamarinds, onions, monkey-nuts, and dips; and an oblong card, not clean nor clear, which acquainted the public that New-Laid Eggs might be there obtained. Mr Figg went in to purchase one or two for his friend, and asked if they were quite fresh. "I niver warrants nothink," answered the woman, warmly; adding, "Th' 'en's is in the back-yard; go through, you'll see 'em for yerself." Mr Figg's quiet acceptance of her assertion and placid manner of paying for three taken from the basket soothed the ruffled owner. No matter who got out of temper, Timothy Figg always preserved his own. The doors were open, and the usual rush for the paying-place absorbing muscular devotion, the two contrived to get through somehow, and hurried up the dirty stone steps. A series of winding turns and twistings round the shell of the building, and they found themselves in that stifling pandemonium, the gallery of the minor theatre, where the first thing Mr Figg proceeded to do was to sit on his three eggs, which he had forgotten all about. A fatal behind-pocket was very much in Timothy's way, and he decided that for the future he would have his pockets on the hips. Timothy was not over-weighted with mind or memory, and just about this time he was occupied in hatching something else.

Like other pleasant evenings, this ran its course; and the two had to leave before the performances concluded, since his employers required Timothy to be in each night by eleven, and Jemima hoped to be home before her mother awoke, when it was usual for her to grumble that there were no customers about, and that trade was bad; and, under the injustice of her destiny, she would drink to a speedy ending of her sorrows, and

for more prosperous times, and then would fall to sleep again —the disturbed sleep so wronged and hard-worked a woman alone could expect. Timothy left his lady at the entrance to the court, and ran on to his own place. Any one else would have found it a lonely place. Not so Timothy. The most grim, dusky, echoing old house of the most desolate-looking of streets, its dismal solitude never caused him a shudder, its loneliness never troubled him. He fastened up the door, lighted a small lamp, visited the kitchen and cut himself a hunch of bread and cheese, and went into the office to eat it, sat on his high stool—and a weird, grim-looking creature he was, well in character with the surroundings. The face came out very old then—pallid and rigid, with thin features and high cheek-bones, and eyes that went over gloatingly to the chest wherein Boggis and Blim kept their papers. Greenish-yellow and ghastly, he might have had for grandsire, some grisly vampire of old churchyards, where such were wont to sit perched in this wise at the dead of night—greenish-yellow and ghastly as any mischievous Jack-o'-lantern that ever deceived the unwary; or flitted, an uncertain guide.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN ODD TRICK.

THERE was nothing hurried about Timothy's process of supper-eating; but so soon as he had finished he made a clean sweep of the books and papers upon the desk, and next closed the shutters of the window over the discoloured blind, which he had hitherto simply drawn down. Then he, with particular cautiousness, unlocked that chest of private papers by which the firm set such store, little surmising their sleepy-looking clerk owned a method of access to them. Timothy was as well informed as themselves on all relating to the Treasure, and the purport of their absence from town. It made him a little more yellow, perhaps—a little more as though for ever standing in the moonlight, but beyond this did not perceptibly affect him. He knew well he could do nothing in it, that treachery would not pay him sixpence in the pound, even had he been so disposed; but the prying curiosity was strong all the same—the ape-like hungering to meddle. And he meddled.

Watch him sideways—tawny and cadaverous; nimble, alert, quick-fingered, and attention-riveted; flapping his elbow-joints active as any bat—no sleepiness now. The indistinctness of outline and shading—his primary characteristic in the day-time—is a thing of the past. He is sharply enough defined now; and as he twists the lamp round, and poses with motionless intentness over the accumulation of evidence, he might be a figure of bronze keeping guard over it.

For an hour or two he studied the absorbing theme, then with a shrug of the shoulders gave it up for the night, replac-

ing the papers with every care as he found them. Having locked the office Figg went up-stairs. He had a soft gliding manner with him, holding the lamp like a sleep-walker and staring into vacancy. He drew his feet along so slowly, without lifting them, that little clouds of dust rose and followed him, so that the black cat on a wall close by—a cat that was staring with great green eyes through the landing-window—must have thought him some ghostly visitant to the premises of Boggis and Blim. An unearthly sort of being altogether by that light; cold of blood, clammy of hand, glittering-eyed, prowling, even as reptiles prowl, upon that cleanly tract of those honest men, Boggis and Blim.

So to his bedchamber, which an Irish pauper would have declined for its dirt and desolation. An old press-bed, a sheet of brown paper for a carpet and one pinned up at the window, constituted the furniture, and the tenant looked dreamily down on his carpet—a corner of which had been torn off to put in his boot to cover a hole; the other piece of paper—that up at the window—he had punctured with holes, and he would lie at night and look at the moon through them, forming a J all down the window with a surrounding of stars. Goldsmith in his "Deserted Village" says—

> "The chest contriv'd a double debt to pay,
> A bed by night, a chest of drawers by day."

Mr Figg's article of furniture performed precisely the same accommodating office. The bedding was conspicuous by its absence, and it did not take the clerk long to settle himself on his hard couch. Ever since he had enjoyed the privilege of being an inmate at Boggis and Blim's, Timothy had been endeavouring to make up his mind as to the comparative comfort and discomfort of his high hard stool and his low hard couch. This lowness had one advantage, however, in Timothy's estimation; it enabled him to watch the rats at their frolics. When all was quiet they came out in their strength, and the clerk never tired of watching their moonlit capers; over the brown paper, over the boards, with a pattering and a squeaking that amused him vastly. There was one he thought like

Boggis, and one he thought like Blim, and they would sit up on their hind-legs along the divisions of the boards, and skip from wainscot to wainscot, for all the world as though surveying and land-measuring. When Timothy was asleep they measured him, until, coming to his face, they retreated frightened; it was so like the face on a stone tomb in some mouldy vault where the dim moonlight steals, but which is far too cold for the warm-hearted frolicsome rats.

In the morning Mr Figg went down at his usual time, half-past seven; and by eight o'clock had opened the office, finished his breakfast, and placed his account-books in order: these were more for show than use; their contents would have astonished the worshipful City Accountants. Some time after nine there was considerable noise without and Boggis appeared upon the scene, very red in the face, and irritable. Travelling helps to soothe the bad temper of some people, but it always made that of Mr Boggis ten times worse, and upon this occasion he returned from a disappointing, money-losing transaction which did not improve it. No amount of abuse, blows, curses, and other highly-seasoned condiments of the Boggis *menu* made any visible impression upon Timothy Figg, clerk. He might have been in a quandary all the time, so impervious was his dubitation. Mr Boggis threw the ledger at Mr Figg. Mr Figg felt it strike him, but with glacial insensibility he calmly placed it back in its rack and preserved an unmoved air of respect.

"Who's bin here since I've bin out?" inquired the employer, growling. He knew of old that violence made no change in his clerk's odd demeanour. Timothy placed memoranda before him, and the semi-educated boor looked them over carelessly. "Mr Blim'll be 'ome shortly and'll attend to it. Anything else?"

"Gent named Ranger called last evening; he would not state his bizness; said he'd look in agen."

"What the devil does he want, I wonder? What was he like?"

"A parson, some-at; long face, black livery. He said you were very nice people, he'd heard!"

"Then he's no good, for everybody knows contrary to that! What did you say in answer?"

"I said nothing agin *you*, whatever I might a thought!"

"I'll break your nob for you, young man!" Then the uncertainty of ever being enabled to perform his threat cooling him, Boggis more civilly enjoined his clerk to keep a sharp look-out while he was gone to the City. Boggis proceeded accordingly, and the clerk sat sprawling toad-like on the top of his high stool, softly repeating to himself—"I'll break your nob for *you*, young man!" And he did not look such a young man either.

He sat with his back to the window, the day-book open before him, a pen in his hand, and he scrawled upon a piece of paper: a gallows, to which dangled Boggis, while behind, awaiting his turn, stood Blim, pinioned. Absorbed he did not notice that his employer had left the office-door ajar. Blim walked in, softly, as he was accustomed to do, in order to catch this young man at his pranks. He caught him; saw himself pinioned, and the uneducated person suspended; and he brought his clenched fist round sharp, and knocked the artist off his perch. Timothy, undisturbed, picked himself up, sucked in his cheeks, pushed his fingers through his hair, and looked at his master an instant, only one, for his eyes caught sight of a black man's head on which Blim leaned a hand while casting a quick glance round the office. The head had for body one of the stoutest sticks Timothy Figg had ever seen, and following on the inquiry of the previous day it began to dawn on him that there was something stirring, and he sucked in his cheeks a little further.

"Any letters?" asked Blim, brusquely.

The clerk handed him the letters; also the memoranda relating to calls.

"These want attending to at once." Blim put his stick up in a corner, hung his hat on a peg, and sat down to write, asking, "Is this all?"

"Gent in last evening; wanted to see you; he said he'd call agen. Ranger the name."

"Don't know it." Blim looked up at his clerk, so blended in

with the dirty drab background that nothing beyond a shade was to be distinguished. "What is he?"

"Member o' Parliament, I believe;" answered Figg, unblushingly. "He said you were very nice people, he thought!"

"And so we are; very nice people!" Blim, of Boggis and Blim's, smacked his lips approvingly. "I hope you confirmed his good opinion?"

"I left him as he were. I couldn't add to his confidence in yer niceness!"

Blim narrowly observed the face of the speaker, but was unable to detect the least sign of *double entente*.

"Mr Boggis has been back, I suppose?"

"About half an hour."

"Gone on to the City?"

"Yes, sir." Blim continued his writing, then took his letters, himself, to the post.

Before he went out the clerk asked, "If the gent calls agen shall I mention any time when you'll be in?"

"Couple of hours—going on to Mr Boggis; shall be away quite that."

After he had gone Figg sat writing for fully half an hour; he was up to the tricks of the vivacious Mr Blim, who was given to misleading and popping in again unawares. At about the expiration of that time he gradually, very slowly, turned his head round to make sure that all was clear, then lowered himself by measured slowness until on the ground, when with a sidelong movement he made for that corner where the stick was leaning against the wall. A black face stared hard at the colourless clerk. Hands on hips, he stooped, and stared hard in return at the South Sea Islander. "Peace to the manes of the Bubble!" exclaims Charles Lamb; here was this relic being stared out of countenance by a phantom clerk! He went a little nearer to it, touched it, took it up, and shook it. It was of weight, would have dealt a death-blow, so massive was that headpiece. The clerk handled it gingerly, curious and excited, yet puzzled how to make anything out of it. Then it occurred to him to try and unscrew the top. It was

fixed tightly, but he felt it move, and twisted it round with energy; after two or three more turnings the head came off. A small hollow was laid bare, and within was a scrap of paper; the characters thereon were yellow with age, and had in the first instance been written by a trembling hand. The clerk coolly placed this in his pocket, and proceeded to screw the head on again.

"I'll break your nob for *you!*" said he softly to himself, replacing the stick and returning to his work.

Boggis and Blim returned in company, and for the remainder of the day were busily occupied in the office. Much did Mr Figg hope that his better-informed employer would leave the stick behind him when departing for the night; for Boggis and Blim lived away from their place of business. Mr Figg intended securing the five shillings volunteered by the gentleman who sketched, and he chuckled quietly to himself over the contemplated enjoyment of outwitting that individual.

Blim, satisfied with possession of his prize, failed to remark that it had been tampered with, nor did he take it when leaving, having purchased it more especially for country use. Timothy waited until eight o'clock, and then made off with it. Mr Ranger was fully expecting him to call, and laughed in his soul when "the fool" appeared. He received him with the beneficent patronage of a chairman of a "Young Men's Association." "So, my friend, you've contrived to oblige me; it's very good of you, very good. Employers back? Ah! And very well, I hope? I quite appreciate your attention, I do indeed; you ought to be one of us! Allow me to handle that stick; upon my word, a very fine specimen of old carving!"

But Mr Figg made no sign of complying with his kind request, indeed stuck as tight to the stick as the classic monkey of our youth. "I think you said I was to have five shillings?" he explained.

"Well, I certainly did say something of the kind—of course after I had sketched it, to do which I shall have to take it in to another room where there's a better light."

"Not till I've got the money," said Timothy, cutely.

To which the man with the long face replied in sorrow: "My young friend, it grieves me to remark the propensity for greed you undoubtedly display; and you must learn that there is no greater offence against society than to doubt the word of a gentleman like myself."

"Five bob, or I'm off!" saying which Mr Figg walked to the door. Mr Ranger fumbled in his pockets.

"We will dispense with your slangy expressions, sir, if you please. Certainly you shall have the five shillings, and very nice too. I trust you'll put them in the Savings Bank, and that they will accumulate and bring you ripe blessing. I must go and get the money, for I find I've none about me. I'll take the stick with me."

"No, you don't," said Timothy Figg, sitting down to wait. Much chagrined, Ranger left the room, and after some little time returned with the money, which he handed to his young visitor, receiving the stick in exchange, with which he again left the room, but re-entered it almost immediately. The broad grin on the clerk's stupid-looking face warned him he had been tricked; he resorted to compromise. "Anything belonging to this?"

"May or may not be. Depends on the price," answered the London original.

"What is the price?" hissed Ranger.

The insensible-looking face became more rigid, the eyes opened wide upon that other being of the green and ghastly moon-seasons, and he answered by a large mouthful, "Ten thousand pounds!" The other fell back,—he knew then that the fool was as wise as himself; he held out his hand, and shook that of Timothy with cordiality. "I hope we may be friends, Mr Figg, I do indeed! I am sure we are alike in tastes and inclinations. I am glad to know you."

"Thank ye, sir," said Timothy, who fully appreciated the friendliness at its proper worth.

"I am not a man of property, my dear Mr Figg, indeed my resources have been cramped by my hobbies, but I am thinking of going into business; from all I have seen of you, I am

quite certain it would improve the interests of any concern to enlist the benefit of your services. I cannot pay you a sum of money down, but I shall be proud to take you into partnership, under the style of RANGER AND FIGG, and very nice too; the experience I possess will balance the experience you possess, and mutual profit will accrue."

"On which side?" asked Mr Figg, innocently.

Mr Ranger laughed pleasantly, he seemed quite a changed individual. "Ah, you must have your little joke, Mr Figg! Well, what do you say? Hand me the paper and I'll take all the bother off your hands, and share the proceeds." This was coming to a plain point. Mr Figg stood up, with his hands behind him, and with a knowing twinkle answered, "Thank ye, I like bother."

"The deuce you do! Then you're one by yourself."

"Think I am," quietly and drily replied the original, buttoning up his straight little coat and putting on his hat.

"Don't go, my dear Mr Figg, until we can come to some arrangement."

"We can come to no arrangement, sir, with advantage to me;" so saying, Timothy walked towards the door. Mr Ranger with some excitement followed him, and placed his hand upon his young friend's shoulder.

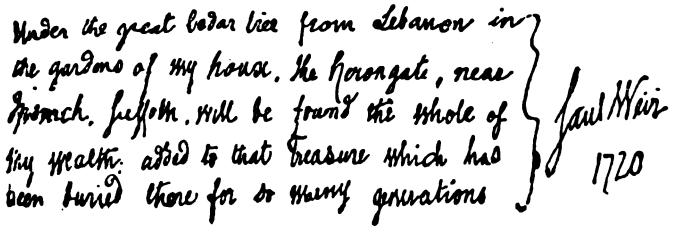
"What *can* I do to invite your confidence and give you a guarantee of my good faith? If what you hold is really genuine, I will try to let you have one hundred pounds for immediate use—more I cannot do. Put it to yourself: even aware of the place of concealment, which I suppose that paper enlightens you upon, how can you, alone and unaided, do anything in it? And if you must associate yourself with somebody else, why not with me, so well disposed towards you, perfectly acquainted with the subject, and inclined in every way to make all as fair for yourself as for me?" Mr Figg seemed struck with the reasoning, and reflected for some few minutes.

"Very well, I'll trust you—I might go further and fare worse; and you seem a respectable sort of a cove. Put the money in my hand first, though. I'm not in the least sus-

picious, but my employers who you consider so nice, have taught me to be extra careful in all matters of business relating to the paying and receiving of money."

At first Mr Ranger demurred, but afraid of standing out lest he should find it slip through his fingers irretrievably, he brought from a valise bank-notes for the amount.

Then Mr Figg handed him the old piece of writing, faintly indistinct as his own face, penned possibly at a moment of solemn anguish, possibly when a shattered reason was strained to perform the deed for the benefit of a troubled conscience. Ranger read it eagerly, the blood mounting to his face, his eyes glaring down upon it as though they would start from their sockets; then, more slowly, he read it again, aloud:—


Under the great cedar tree from Lebanon in
the gardens of my house. the Horongate, near
Ipswich. Suffolk. will be found the whole of
my wealth. added to that treasure which has
been buried there for so many generations
Saul Weir
1720

CHAPTER XXXII.

GARDEN PLOTTING.

WHEN Messrs Boggis and Blim arrived at their office on the following morning, they found, to their amazement, that no sort of morning preparation had been made; the door had not been opened nor the window-shutters taken down; and Boggis, admitting himself by means of his private key, went lumbering upstairs to Mr Figg's bedroom, intent on punishment, while Blim proceeded to let the light into their den; and they discovered their loss simultaneously. Boggis came blundering down again crying, "He's bolted!" while Blim glided to meet him with the hissed warning, "The stick! He's been one too many for us after all!" Then they looked at one another anxiously, yet with that blending of cunning which goes crawling round a difficulty to find the best way out of it.

"Shut the door, Boggis," said Blim, politely, measuredly, and as though much was behind. In singular contrast to this quiet bearing the rougher scamp kicked it terrifically; whereupon Blim, still polite and smiling, asked, "I do wish you would not make so much noise—it scatters one's ideas."

"Now noise allus puts ideas into my head, so that's the difference atween us." With his most surly and morose expression, Boggis fell lead-like and utterly unpliable into the one arm-chair. The astute Blim bore with his partner's ill-humour, and examining a paper in his pocket-book, he cursorily remarked,—"My little habit of taking a copy of everything will serve us in good stead; not that I should have forgotten the very plain directions on the manuscript."

"What's the good of taking copies of things if you never forget nothing? Might spend the time taking care o' the property."

"Yes; I'm afraid our last investment is gone. Some people make a good thing out of both land and timber, but it seems we can't."

"It all comes o' that blessed arguing o' yourn. You said the office was the very safest place to leave the stick, but it wasn't, you see."

"Well, it was out of the question carrying it about the City. But now, to come to business, I think there can be no doubt that, first, Figg is posted on all concerning our big scheme; second, that he is in somebody's pay; third, that immediate use will be made of the valuable knowledge thus acquired. They will endeavour to gain access to the Herongate, but we should be beforehand with them. The game has grown desperate, I admit, and we cannot afford to shrink at this juncture."

"What do you call a juncture? Ain't it at Clapham juncture they scream out on the line?"

"Not altogether; we won't go into that. I will use the word 'point,' if you please; at this point there must be no faltering."

"In course not; why should there be? I hope by right o' hard work and perseverance, to say nothing o' scratching up the history, we're entitled to the Treasure. If there's a man with a better right to it, let him walk in and say so."

"I dislike that phrase very much; it sounds almost like an invitation."

"Do it? Well, 'tisn't so meant," and Boggis kicked out viciously, in illustration of its contrariety.

"We must get a boy for the office—advertise, I think."

"And the sooner the better. Give us a sheet of paper."

Blim obeyed, somewhat surprised at the energy of his burly partner, who had pulled his chair round to the table, caught up a pen, and shortly afterwards produced the form of advertisement in the magnified penmanship peculiar to his hand. Mr Blim read this production:—

BOY WANTED.—To wait on his Masters, and make hisself generally useful. No red or yellow haired ones need answer this. Call at Boggis & Blim's, Shark Street, London.

"Oh, this won't do!" cried Blim, alarmed. "We want a youth of strict respectability, truthful, alive to the responsibility of the situation. We shouldn't get such a lad by that advertisement. To tell truth, it's a notch below a high-class concern like ours." The rascals caught the twinkle in each other's eyes, and laughed outright.

"You're a scholard," said Boggis, with a sneer; "let's see how you'll improve on it! Don't much matter how, so long as we get one."

Blim wrote out the following crafty decoy:—

TO PARENTS AND GUARDIANS.—A well-educated youth leaving school can be received in the office of an old-established firm of Land Surveyors, where he will be instructed in the profession and treated as one of the family. Premium, £40. Apply to Messrs Boggis & Blim, Surveyors by Appointment, Shark Street.

"I'll have this put in the papers at once," said Blim, "because until we've got our boy we can't very well leave. And now for my plan *in re* the Herongate. As soon as I discovered our prize, I walked over and had a look at it. Imagine a fine old hall, standing back in a great garden; upon the left side of the lawn, in view of all the windows that side—mark, because it adds to our difficulty—stands a grand old tree, *a cedar tree.* See it?"

"No, I don't," grumbled Boggis, shortly.

"In your mind's eye, picture it. That is the spot, sir," cried Blim, with enthusiasm—"the El Dorado."

"What the devil's that?" snapped the other, staring at him with obtuse discontent. "Jest explain as you go on."

"All right, my friend, it is there—*there*, after all our doubts and disappointments, and we hold millions in the hollow of our hands."

"Now don't you say that," interrupted Boggis, scratching

ferociously at his palm with his long nails, "because we don't, you know. Allus confine yerself to the truth."

"You know what I mean?" replied the other, with impatience. The first step, of course, is to concoct some plan for getting in, for you can't go trespassing about a gentleman's grounds with any satisfaction or any safety; besides, people in our position like to be very careful. It is always policy to see an imaginary board up."

"How can you see a board up if it's imaginary?"

Blim waved aside this irritating blindness, and continued, "There can be no doubt, I think, from the aspect of the garden, that the tenants of the Herongate are garden-lovers; at the same time, to the eye of a professed landscape gardener the grounds present a lamentably neglected condition."

"I don't want to hear anything about that."

"Wait a bit; it is very evident if the grounds were so planned as to be pleasant to the eye and pleasing to the fancy, it would exercise a cheering effect upon the poor invalid."

"Didn't know there was one."

"Well, there is, then. The only child of the owner is a confirmed invalid, and her chief delight is in being wheeled about this old garden; her father has expended no end of wealth and will spare no cost to humour her fancy, or create charms to beguile her thoughts from pain; here lies our opportunity: I present myself, with concocted credentials, as a Home and Continental Landscape Gardener, and with the plans of improvement I shall present for the artistic remodelling of the Herongate Gardens, I shall count upon a favourable hearing. If the young lady is only present at the first interview, my success is assured, for the eloquent manner in which I purpose describing the scenic beauties and romantic design of the suggested improvements cannot but make an impression."

"I'm out of my depth; can't follow you; you run on too fast for me; it's a market-garden'll pay best,—is that what you're trying to say?"

"Good conscience, no! Let's see if I can make you understand." Mr Blim set to work again, and at last made it

clear to his somewhat dull partner, concluding with, "You will thus understand that when the permission is obtained, I shall be at liberty to turn over the soil at the Herongate;" and then, with a cackling sort of laugh, the artful partner made a movement with his hands, pantomimic of bringing up the Treasure. Boggis watched his confederate with the closest attention. Before he could reply, Blim added, "And of course one won't be sufficient when it comes to action; so that, when I telegraph you my success, you must on the following day present yourself as the Government Inspector of Property. I will give you the necessary drilling, and draw up or procure the necessary documents, but you will have to rely mainly upon your own tact and audacity; and as this is the first occasion when you have not been backed by me, I do hope to goodness you won't make a mull of it!"

"It's cheek you want, ain't it? a regular cheeky inspection of old What's-his-name's property? I'm your man!"

"Upon my word," said Blim, crestfallen and disgusted, "I'm two minds about letting you come."

"Are ye? But I ain't two minds about letting myself; you ain't going to have it quite all your own way."

Blim turned white with rage. This was a dilemma he had not foreseen. His bull-like partner might be of use at times, but at others was decidedly in the way. It was so probable he would, by blundering coarseness and ignorance, imperil both his own and Blim's representation, it rendered it risky. But there was no getting out of it, and the arrangement was decided upon.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

JUDGMENT.

We cannot keep the fate of a most important person in this history any longer a matter of uncertainty. Mr Noah Tomkins was left at the mercy of that bloodthirsty and avaricious, if domesticated pair, the Messrs Beaver, whose nefarious designs, crowned thus far with success, threatened the worst possible consequences to that unfortunate member of the Great Tomkins Family, placed so calamitously at their mercy. Mr Noah was not one of the strongest; his strength, indeed, reposed in his moral excellence, and if it came to a tussle, he knew he should be the sufferer. Eagerly he scanned the banks of the river with the hope of discovering some party of peaceful anglers, or any one, to whom, by a shout, he might make this outrage known. But the river's banks, equally with the river, seemed deserted and given over to the detestable pair. Mr Noah had never felt such an absence of all dignity and composure, he was literally another self; it was such a barefaced act to be perpetrated in broad daylight, and upon *him* who had always been so careful to turn aside lest he should tread upon a worm: his indignation quite kept pace with his fear, and both were going at a pretty good speed, for, despite his awkwardness, the boat floated onward to the lonely desolate tract he dreaded by instinct; it was too much of an undiscovered region for him to know anything of it personally. Trees, hedges, gates, cottages, dykes, sheep-pens, a ruined windmill, lowering clouds, all flitted before him, making him quite choleric; teams appeared to be crawling, snail-like, up the brown ridges, so rapidly did he seem to be drifting to destruction.

Never would the sensitive Mr Noah forget this little row on the romantic Orwell; and all the time of it his mind was excruciatingly upon the rack, surmising the interpretation that would be put upon his absence, and the advantage that might be taken of it. In a serious dilemma like this he could not by any sophism disguise from himself that Brother Adam and Brother Seth hated him as cordially as he hated them.

"You're doing all the work, Phineas; give Mr Tomkins the other oar, perhaps he'll enjoy using two better than one! I'll hold your little jewel-case, Mr Tomkins!" saying which, Mr Beaver made a snatch at it; but even in his terror Mr Noah was faithful to the interests of the Great Tomkins Family, and clung tenaciously to it.

"Oh, come, this won't do, you know!" cried the Beaver, with jocund earnestness; "you can't row with that thing in your arms. We've heard all about you people on the Orwell, that you're out-and-outers when you warm to it. You stick as tight to that bit o' iron as I used to my cash-box when I went every Saturday to the Bank by the Penny Steamboat." Saying this, he, with the playfulness of a bear, again laid a paw upon the precious box. Noah cast a rapid glance in the direction of land; they were close in shore, possibly on purpose; he meditated a terrific spring; Beaver held firm hold upon the box and looked his directions to Phineas. Noah saw that the critical moment had come, and rose with the abrupt spring patent to the Brothers Tomkins; the others did the same; the boat lurched, dipped short to the water, and capsized, the three floundering in the river. The superior strength of Beaver bore off the box, and as he went sprawling up the bank, smooth, glossy with the wet, slow, tame, domestic, he looked for all the world like a large species of the order of his name. Phineas junior swam in his rear, fighting the bulrushes and splashing the water with tumultuous eagerness to get out of it. And the pitiable victim of this dastardly outrage, with queer noises in his ears, and his eyes unable to see, threw up his arms, while the current bore him onward, and for a few seconds the bed of the sloping bank seemed to descend below him; then he trod upon some-

thing, and felt himself opposed, it instantly brought hope; courage was jerked into him by the abrupt checking of his motion; he stretched out his hands and clutched at it, the great bough of a tree growing low to the water, upon the roots of which he had planted his feet; by means of it he clambered up, and stood dripping on the grass, looking down upon himself ruefully, while he shivered over his plight. He dared not enter the town in that disreputable condition, nor did he exactly know the way to it from there; no house nor being was within sight, even his assailants had disappeared, taking with them the box; and Noah glanced sullenly up at the threatening clouds (for it looked as though it was going to rain with a vengeance), and wondered if this was consistent treatment of a man of real practical piety and unapproachable virtue. "I don't see the good of wasting money upon church lecterns, if this is how one is to be used in return!" And disgustedly, irritably, grumbling, moaning, cursing and swearing, and chilled to the bone, this infirm Tomkins pushed on for somewhere: a boggy morass was all about him, in which his devoted feet sank at every step, great frogs coming forth with croaking laughter at his futile efforts to extricate himself; scant skeleton trees without any leaves on them, long unnatural grass that twisted about his feet, hovering birds, black, fierce, that he imagined waited to peck his eyes out,—and these were not like any other eyes, they were the Tomkins' eyes, and he stared with them defiantly; it was an awful place to him. Just then it began to thunder: "Ah, Jupiter!" said Noah, excitedly, "do you begin to add to it?" Great drops of rain fell, and he grinned upon himself sardonically; he wondered if he should ever get dry, and felt to be in for it finely. For half an hour he went stumbling about, and at last sat down on a short cattle-post, grimly woe-begone and moody, wondering where on earth the road could be, and disposed to sit on his post in the rain until something turned up in the shape of a guide. The storm cleared off, the sun broke through the massed clouds and lay all along the wet fresh green meadows, and a voice—he thought it the sweetest he had ever heard, as it probably was—drawing near carolled

a lay of Ghent with gay expression, yet plaintive tenderness; and Brother Noah went after it instantly: if it wasn't a Will-o'-the-wisp astride the rainbow there might be a road in that direction. There was, and Mr Noah saw a good-looking young man with a profusion of graceful curls about a well-shaped head, whereon was tossed, sideways, a drab soft hat, in which he had stuck a circle of the black feathers picked up on his way. At any other time this would have savoured too much of the "unsophisticated blackbird," but just now Mr Noah was not so particular, and he looked after the drab light-hearted stranger rather gratefully for having put him on the trail of civilisation. He had an idle careless gait that became him; he walked quickly, as though, with all his *nonchalance*, bent upon business. Mr Noah did not attempt to delay him, and the young man had scarcely gone from sight one way, when the other way there came into sight a horse and long van, evidently connected with some carnal amusement of the worldly. It seemed of ponderous weight, for it advanced but slowly, and was, he discovered, an exhibition. Upon its weather-worn sides huge letters announced—

DOBSON'S GIGANTIC PANORAMA.

HOLLAND, BELGIUM, AND THE RHINE.

TWO HOURS ON THE CONTINENT FOR ONE SHILLING.

"I wish to goodness I was there!" said Mr Noah, irritably.

Upon the platform ledge above the shafts appeared the fairest specimen of female kind, he as a Tomkins, had ever permitted himself to look upon. Under existing wretched circumstances he allowed himself to look again, and in spite of his damp and chilly exterior warmed rapidly. Her beauty, once seen, was to be unforgotten; he remembered the face again. When last beheld, upon the Parade at Tunbridge Wells, it thrilled even him, but the fortunate presence of his Brothers averted a catastrophe. Now he was alone and took advantage of it. She seemed to be looking down on him with

pity or some other tender feminine feeling, with which he of course was unfamiliar, but he held up his hand, asking her how far it was to the town. She stopped the horse, and a sonorous masculine voice answered for her, commencing in the interior of the caravan.

"It's what we want to know ourselves, stranger; I've but just sent a scout on ahead to report. We're necessarily slow travelling. The Continent isn't to be drawn along a highroad at express, I can tell you." Here Dobson came out. "Nice shower we've had; makes it cooler for the horse: you look as if you'd bin caught in it; seen you afore, I think; ain't you the man I saw with a monkey on Ramsgate Sands?"

Ramsgate was a place the Great Tomkins Family would on no account have gone to; and Mr Noah was very shocked to be taken for the vagrant proprietor of a monkey. Then he bethought him of his appearance; after all, it was not wonderful if his social standing was undiscoverable. He explained matters to Mr Dobson, who was now standing by the side of the girl, and flourishing a whip expansively, as accustomed to embrace territory upon the bird's-eye plan.

"Rowing on the river our boat capsized, and I narrowly escaped with my life. For a long time I have been trying to find the road, and have, as you say, been exposed to the fury of what you were pleased to call a nice shower. No doubt it looked so to you; I call it a diabolical storm. If it wasn't for a submissive spirit it would have been almost unbearable; as it is, I shall have to be resigned to rheumatism for the remainder of my life."

"Well, now, don't ye go knocking agin mischief afore it comes upon ye. That isn't my plan. I don't fear it afore, nor feel afraid of it at the time, but just pushes my way through somehow. If I can help ye a bit now, ye're welcome; there's a little room with a fire in it, and my lecturer's dress-suit (and a nobby one it is), and if you care to accept it while yourn are drying, why, it's right you are, and step up."

The shudder at being compelled to put on the motley garb of a mummer of Vanity Fair disappeared before Mr Noah's sincere desire to escape, if possible, the rheumatism—probably

see a little more of the fair child of Holland, Belgium, and the Rhine.

The Tomkins spring made Mr Noah naturally very elastic, and he stepped up with quite wanton lightness of the heel.

Jessie descended and sat on a large stone, looking thoughtfully at the verdant grass-land, and away where in the far distance, hills, or great clouds in a ridge that touched the landscape, just caught the slanting rays and shone bright as the vision of a promised land. What thoughtfulness fell like a veil over her lovely eyes while looking absently into the far beyond, the hidden, the mysterious future! She was so pensive sometimes, but it was always when Merry was away; she would not let him see it,—he was far too good to grieve. Her condition in life, with its unsatisfactory social definition, caused her many thoughtful hours of which nobody knew. Pure as are angels, the most slender indiscretion would have been impossible, but the world would not know that, and it was possible she might be misjudged; this flitted in a hazy manner across her mind. To avert any chance of her being pained, Mr Tattergast, by semi-official manifesto announced her as his sister; but it was entering every town and lodging at every house with a lie, and Jessie hated it. Lovable, truthful, sincere, it pained her also; and between choice of two reproaches she could but look from the shafts of the old van away to where grey clouds or hills were tipped with glory, as by a Hand that converts to splendid issue the stormy hours that are all too sombre.

She was aroused by a polite insinuating voice near her, and turned her head instantly. From within had come the metamorphosed Mr Noah, and the change was of a nature to cause her to look surprised. A black suit was in no degree unbecoming to Mr Noah, but this was of so astonishing a cut that it transformed him into a rakish loose presentment that was a clear libel on the irreproachable character he represented.

"You are enjoying this peaceful prospect, improving your taste for beauty, strengthening your already perfect health?" with a sly and admiring glance at the delicate prettiness of her face.

"No, I was sitting here because you were inside." And Jessie, with a flushed cheek, but with modesty exceeding the annoyance, arose abruptly.

Mr Noah was not in this position every day, and was not going to be set right as though in Ipswich; he stepped a little nearer to her.

"Has it ever occurred to you what a truly pretty girl you are,—how evidently intended for some superior station?" What unctuous flattery this old fox could instil into his talk, when so minded!

Jessie looked round for Mr Dobson. She was displeased at being left alone with this person, whose talk and manners were anything but to her taste. Dobson was busy drying the clothes. Mr Noah drew a little closer, and was speaking softly with his most gallant expression when this just retribution happened: Mr Adam and Mr Seth, arm-in-arm on their way to the Herongate, passed, saw their brother—in that curious gear, that tender attitude—with the most shocked and horrified look imaginable; and lifting each his Oxford-mixture gloved hand, the fingers of which they expanded to hide the low revelation from their pure gaze, they passed on, the virtuous spring lifting them as never before upon this earth, their whole bearing and mien significant of outrage, astonishment, and poignant realization of the discreditable situation. Of course, Mr Noah witnessed the manœuvre and understood it. "This is serious," he muttered; "and they're on the way to the Herongate or I'm very much mistaken." Then calling inside: "Here you,—showman! Dobson—what's your name,—are the clothes almost dry?"

Dobson, who was another great man, was not going to stir himself at a summons of that sort, and the gentleman in the dress-suit had to put a far finer point on it. Then Mr Dobson appeared at his leisure, and coolly saying, "I thought you was calling your monkey," sat down on the step to a quiet pipe.

It was a couple of hours before Mr Noah's clothes showed signs of approaching a condition ready for wear, and during this time Dobson, with his accustomed volubility, related many amusing anecdotes of their wanderings, and Jessie

amused herself, sitting on another stone a little distance away, plucking and arranging grasses.

"Yours is a strange life, my friend," remarked Mr Noah.

"So is yourn, mayhap, come to go into it." The Ipswich magnate winced.

"I mean to say, a wandering restless existence, without any sure foundation; never comforted, I daresay, by the teaching of any place of worship."

Dobson arose with a red cheek and a rude dignity, reverently waving a hand across earth and sky, "Yonder's my place o' worship, and I'm taught to be satisfied with what I have and to envy no man naught." He sat down again; he had uttered his simple creed, and it would have taken a better than Noah Tomkins to spoil his happy contentment with it. But that random shaft pierced.

"I don't care anything about your being satisfied, it's the morals I look at."

"What are they?" asked Dobson, with delightful unconsciousness, filling another pipe.

"All those beauties of character never spoken of without a modest blush, nor thought of without deep gratitude for their possession."

"Yes; I ain't got any," said Dobson, bluntly; "and if you'll take yourn off we shall get on to Ipswich a good sight quicker." He smoked his pipe with sturdy enjoyment, quite undisturbed as to whether his remarks pleased or offended. Dobson was a man of sovereign independence; he expressed his opinion and left it to take care of itself.

"Well, my dear," he called to Jessie when their guest had withdrawn to put on his own suit, which was now dry; "most tired of jogging along on wheels?"

She looked towards him with a pleasant smile, "I shall be glad to get to the town, Mr Dobson."

"I know you will. We shall be some little time before we make another move." Here Dobson joined her. "By the by, Miss Jessie—is it my fancy, or have you noticed it too?—Seems to me your brother is a little quiet,—thoughtful, for him."

"It has struck me Merry is thoughtful,—for him." She spoke with an accent of pain. "I asked him if he was sad about anything. He lightly laughed it off; but it was not his laugh." Her voice had sunk very low, and it was so tremulous it attracted his notice. How she yearned to confide in some one! How grievous it was to be always journeying about the great world, and to have never a friend to whom to go with her anxiety and sorrow! Then Dobson sat by her side and whispered to her—

"I shouldn't be surprised if you was to lose your brother. You know girls can't keep 'em always. They will seek other ties. I'm a close observer, Miss; and I tell you I noticed a change at Meadowford. That's where he's left his thoughts, depend on it."

The girl's heart was wrung with agony. She could contain herself no longer, but, falling upon her knees beside him, leaning her head upon his knee, her eyes overflowing with tears, she confessed, in broken language, the truth at last.

"He is not my brother—and we love each other."

"Oh, thank you!" said the dry ironic voice of Mr Noah, who was just emerging from the van. "This is a nice fraternity! It's lucky I didn't press the moralities too closely! A pretty kettle of fish, truly!"

Without one word Dobson laid down his pipe, drew himself up manfully, passed the shrinking girl, sprang upon the van, and seized her insulter by the nape of his neck, then, with a vigorous kick of his sensible boot, sent him a considerable distance into the road. "There, Miss Jessie, is his answer; I'll give you yourn as soon as I've lighted my pipe agen."

Mr Noah, who was unfortunate upon this eventful day, looked back once with a bitter scowl, but consoled himself with the reflection that from this low class of people one might expect any treatment. "And after all, they're not assassins, like those infernal Beavers." At this juncture it flashed upon him with revived horror that the latter still had possession of the iron box containing the clue. "Of which, no doubt, they will make immediate use, unless forestalled by my amiable brothers."

The tall thin form was soon out of sight. The wide white road lay before the travellers without speck or shadow. The steady old mare had been quietly eating the grass by the wayside, sedately, as though conscious that the rest would relieve the Continent of its heavy drag.

Jessie returned to her place upon the platform ledge above the shafts, and they went on again. Graceful birds skimmed through the air, as though describing magic circles about her destiny. A low flower-fragrant breeze fluttered her soft brown hair, kissed her hot lips coolingly, and dried up the tear-drops with the exquisite gentleness of a mother's hand. Long slanting lines of sunlight reached across the meadows, and seemed like paths of radiance and peace. Out of the world God answered her, forgivingly, lovingly, with assurance that, if but a poor nomad, she was yet a cherished child. This calm influence stole upon her while Dobson drew profound reflective whiffs as he resumed his pipe. Then he laid a hand blandly, affectionately, upon his young friend's head, delivering himself of judgment,—"If Tattergast has loved *thee*, child, he will never love another."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TOUCHING UPON HUSBANDRY.

SLOWLY the ponderous old van advanced, its owner and his fair companion longing for some sign of their drawing near to the town. The flat marshy expanse upon either side was soon left behind; outlying farms and rustic homesteads of the humbler sort were passed at intervals; a meeting-house, where the country-folk collected to hear the Word expounded by faithful and honest speakers, not too far removed by illimitable genius and unconquerable conceit to address these humble worshippers; a little red-bricked schoolhouse, windows partly open, the children singing the afternoon hymn before dismissal: here Dobson pulled up the old mare, to listen. This is the true music: away with your Italian Opera and the hysteric shrieking of emblazoned demireps in poisonous atmospheres! Give us the great sky, the children's voices, the dear old hymns! Add the sweet scent of these country lanes, and nothing is more enjoyable.

Pensive Jessie sat listening, with an intent gaze, enthralled, thinking it the most pleasing incident of their travels.

Mr Dobson gave his mare the word and she sturdily pulled on. Late flowers in the schoolhouse garden seemed resolved to deck the year to its end, and they sent forth clouds of fragrance strong as though in summer time. The schoolmistress cultivated herbs, and such always add pleasant odour in the rear of their richer friends the flowers. Some distance further the van came to a wheelwright's, and Dobson called to the man at work in his shed; he called again, louder, while the mare brought a hoof down heavily on the hard road. The

wheelwright looked up, opening his eyes wider at the sight of the odd concern. He could not read very well, and believed it was something in the war way, perhaps a baggage-waggon; so he stubbornly went on with his work of peace, and left the concern to its business likewise.

"What on earth is the matter with the man?" asked Dobson of himself, while getting slowly down. He walked up to the shed. "I want you to have a look at my wheels; we've had a long drag, and the tire of one on 'em seems to me to be rickety. And I should like a pail o' water for the horse, if you don't mind?"

The man went over to look at the wheels, while his lad brought the water to the thirsty and tired horse, the man's wife, meantime, standing at her door with the usual cottage wonder and inquisitiveness. The doctor of circles announced that there was nothing the matter, and so they went on again.

"I shall be glad o' my steak, Miss Jessie; and you will never be more grateful for a cup o' tea, eh?" Asked with kind solicitude; she looked faint and weary, and when this weary look came over her features their delicacy was so enhanced it was impossible not to notice it.

"Yes, Mr Dobson, I am beginning to feel rather tired."

"Now, yonder's my idea of a farmhouse," exclaimed the owner of a portion of the Continent. "I shouldn't mind if that belonged to me; and that's the sort of home where *you* would be most happy."

It certainly was an exquisite demesne—the very picture of prosperous circumstance. An imposing residence of capacious size surrounded by the buildings and belongings of husbandry in its most cultivated state. The house itself was old, and romantic; with gables, with great casements, with unexpected angles, all at this time thickly hung with creepers; while upon the front, crimson-flowered climbers stole prettily up and surrounded the door and windows. The out-buildings, on the other hand, were of modern erection, constructed upon the most improved principles, built with a solidity indicating the tenant's intention, God willing, of not permitting the property to pass from the family. Such well-built offices inform

the stranger that a son or sons are allied with the farmer in his business. The number of stacks, laid in regular order on low stone pillars, coped to exclude rats and mice, bespoke the nature of the year's ingathering. Open to the rickyard were the barns, with threshing-floors and granaries overhead. Fold-yards for cattle, and sheds for young stock, and a large sheep-yard; cow-houses and calf-pens, with lofts above; the straw-barn and chaff-house; sheds for carts and implements, and for waggons; stables for cart and saddle horses, with the fodder-store and harness-room;—these were some of the buildings filling the picture: and their good repair, spacious dimensions, and cleanly surroundings, added to Mr Dobson's prepossession. At the back of the house were the poultry-yards, the dairy, with cheese-room above, the brewhouse and bakehouse; and beyond the flags paving the domestic court, the wood and tool houses. A representative old farmstead, truly English, a standing witness of peaceful prosperity, of steady industry, of good feeling between masters and men,—in fact there is no doubt they were close to the premises of that worthy man John Clark, and his noble body-guard of sons. Chief, however, of all the belongings, was the garden, clad in late autumn's deep-toned hues, and arousing the admiration of the passer-by. At all times the pride of the place, at this season it presented so rich an aspect it caught the attention more than at any time. A gorgeous pageant of full-coloured sumptuous blossom, soon to be over, and vivid with the hectic protest; all the jewel-like gradation of warm tints flushed the beds and stretched from wall to wall and from palings to palings: truly it was a charming sight, and it completed the beauty of the scene.

"Well, may I never! why, *there* he is, and cool as a cucumber, as usual!"

It was Mr Dobson who uttered this singular and eccentric exclamation, causing his companion to look in the same direction, and she shrank back slightly. On the lawn stood the erratic Merry Tattergast, and, of course, with one of the prettiest girls in creation beside him, and equally of course, with the inevitable flowers, this time in the form of a tre-

mendous bunch, culled at random from the rich collection around. He soon caught sight of the long unwieldy van and its portly driver, and waved his hand gaily. He said a few words to the young lady, while handing her the nosegay, and she ran with it instantly across the garden as the crow flies, and without taking the trouble to go round by the gate, leaped the low border with the agility of an antelope—not the first time by a good many; and she did not stand considering in the road, but came alongside the Continent, and scaled it before the astonished sentinel could offer any resistance.

"Jessie," she said, in the most prettily pouting form of insistance possible to be imagined; and she saw her shrink back, retiring, rather sad-looking, and certainly surprised. None of it abashed the vivacious Louise, who, with her most warm-hearted manner said, "Some flowers, dear, your brother has gathered; we've been looking out for you such a long time!" and then she kissed her with the heartiest kiss poor Jessie had ever in her life experienced. And truly she did not know what to make of this sprightly one, but her childlike, unaffected warmth, was so cordially sincere, and there was such mirthful genuine innocence in mien and manner, in the looks and on the lips, that Jessie could not long give way to the surprise which at first took possession of her.

But the young lady calmed down a little after this impetuous effort, and with grace which surprised Jessie again, since it followed so closely on her former hoydenish freak,—with inimitable grace, she begged Jessie would alight and allow her to make a cup of tea. The deep sympathetic kindness, gently expressed and intensely solicitous, quite moved the girl. Dobson also was impressed by its good nature and joined in the request.

"Do, Miss Jessie, since the young lady's so thoughtful; you know you were wishing for it. I'll wait with the greatest of pleasure."

"Thank you, Mr Dobson," said the young lady; "and perhaps you'll let me bring you a tankard of our best home-brewed?"

"If I said 'No' to that, Miss, I should be unkind to you and

myself. Perhaps, as you're so obliging, you'll tell me how my friend yonder fell in with such good company?"

"Oh yes. I was playing with my dog, when it began to bark, and I knew it could not be at me; so I looked round, and saw your friend walking about the garden as naturally as though he was one of my cousins. I walked up and asked him his business. I meant to be grave, but his eyes set me laughing at my best. He didn't look a bit like a culprit while explaining that the temptation of my beautiful flowers had been too much for his honesty. You know if my uncle had been in he *would* have been angry; but I forgave him, and said he might have all he liked—they *are* mine, you know. So he plucked all he wanted, telling me they were for his Jessie, who would let him have one for his coat now and then; he spoke so affectionately of Jessie, indeed, I felt prepared to love her right off."

This ingenuous narration was brought to an abrupt close by the sound of the quick approach of well-mounted horsemen, who were slackening speed while drawing nearer to the farm. Curious, Louise must hold on to the van while stretching her pretty neck to look sideways along the length of it to see who it was. She drew back quickly, saying, "Please don't let them see me; I know them, or they know me, or something; I don't know what!" Then she jumped into the little room and hid herself.

They of the Panorama being quiet-going people, thought this young lady's conduct peculiar in the extreme. The horsemen came up with the van, one on either side, and he on the right hand called out with the cry of a hunter, "It's too late, Madcap—you're discovered!"

Whereupon she came forth, flushed and pretending to be angry. "If you call me names I'll stop here all my life! Besides, there's a gentleman in the garden. What can he think?"

The horseman who had spoken dismounted, and came to the van to assist her down. While doing so he asked, with a really grieved manner, "Where on earth shall we find you next?"

"I don't know, any more than you do," she answered; then

added, to tease, "you should always set one of my cousins to watch that I don't get into mischief."

"Young lady," said Lord Gascoyne, with intense pain, perceptible, low as was the tone, "one of these days you will break the heart of some good brave man."

"No," she answered, instantly and very gravely, while looking him full in the eyes; "I am not cruel—only wickedly thoughtless." The touching contrition, the exquisitely candid look in her beautiful eyes, the little sorrowful curve to the dainty mouth, so affected his lordship that he murmured aside, "And I hope to goodness I shall not be that man!"

The spoilt one was herself again the next moment. "You've got to come down, Jessie, and have your tea." Then to his lordship, "Help her down as nicely as you helped me—now, if you don't, I'll be cross." It was out of the question refusing her anything; and his lordship, with indifferent grace, was about to offer his services, when he was pushed quietly aside, and that nimble genius Merry Tattergast stepped lightly up between them. Raising his old grey head-gear to the sportive Louise, he quickly caught up the reins, and Dobson's Panorama was in motion. "Stow that, Mr Tattergast!" cried the disappointed proprietor, "you've done me out of my home-brewed."

"Never mind, sir; our main object is to get to Ipswich; it is but a short distance on."

"You didn't seem to be troubled about that just now, young man."

"It was no use till I had the chance of hurrying you on a bit. The old horse pulls slowly this afternoon."

"She's pretty well done up, I 'spect, like your sister, who you've stopped from having a nice cup o' tea."

"That, my sister will have with me, thanks." And the young man next turned his attention to her pretty pale face, Dobson the while watching narrowly. He was trying to make this young man out, for he often puzzled him. Merry noticed Jessie's dejection, and, with infinite consideration, at once tried to remove the weight of care. "Troubled by my wayward, idle, whimsical love of flowers, Jessie? I must

really give it up, the flowers seem always tended by such fair keepers. Wherever I go, allured by some elegant rose, its guardian starts up protectingly."

"The guardians do not seem to frighten you," she answered, looking at him with mournful meaning in her fine eyes.

"No," he said, with comical sorrow, "I am not very often frightened. But I really will reform, my Jessie—really, truly. I'll take to wearing nettles as a token of penitence, and only change these for dock when forgiven."

His droll delivery of this produced a smile. She gave him her hand forgivingly, and wondering, perhaps, a little, which was more evident, his laxity in regard to himself or his particularity in regard to her?

The lumbering old van rolled onward. They knew they were drawing near to the town's boundaries, for a brick wall was passed whereon this enlivening advertisement stared the weather-worn announcement on the van largely in the face:—

CONTINENTAL TOUR.

ONE SHILLING.

BOOK PLACES AT THE CORN EXCHANGE.

Mr Dobson ran his eye along it with proud gratification smiling to himself contentedly, while humouring the poor horse in front with a looser rein.

* * * * * * *

Louise, the garden sprite, stood by the gate, watching the Panorama until it was out of sight.

"Now, young lady, if you have done following that show-cart, perhaps you will inform me how you are to-day?"

"I was very well, but you've annoyed me. It isn't a show-cart; it's a country carriage."

"All right; I have no wish to diminish its vehicular dignity," assented Lord Gascoyne, laughing, while he opened the gate. Then, to Mr Masheter, "You will dismount?"

"By all means. I have ridden over on purpose to hear

Miss Louise describe to me some more of her adventurous history."

"Will you go round?" asked Louise, "or shall I call the boy?"

"I will take the horses round. No doubt I shall discover some one in the yard."

When Mr Masheter had turned in at the farm gate his lordship became very serious, both hands resting upon the little gate of the garden as though it opened or shut the future. And he looked along the white road wistfully, perhaps trying to see the end of the hopes aroused and cherished almost against hope. She was so fitful; and those attendant cousins loomed like cruel boulders. It was seven to one; and she was always with them; and they were young, handsome, possessed of all likely to commend them. It seemed as though she *must* choose one for her partner for life; and this grey-haired elderly nobleman did not like the situation at all. "I do wish I could catch you one day in a really serious mood," he said to her, earnestly.

"I can be as serious as anybody," she replied, with grave playfulness.

"Well, just be so, for ten short minutes."

"They will be long if I am so very serious."

"Oh dear, how tantalising you are!" he exclaimed, with impatience.

"It's not a bit of good getting cross with me. When my cousins get cross I coax them; but I shall not do that with you. I shall just get cross too."

"Thank you." He was becoming warmer than his fastidious ethics allowed. He was severely mortified.

"You are looking as surly as ever you can, and I hate surly people." She flung this at him pettishly. A pretty snarl, truly, between a dog and a kitten, all by a garden gate. Some rue growing near caught Miss Haughtiness; and she snapped at a piece, and stuck it in her dress, while pouting in a fashion more captivating than captious. Then, seeing him look extremely disconsolate, she plucked it out again, threw it on the ground, and trampled on it. And how his

rapt gaze traced the revolution from below his downcast lashes! He stepped gently to her side, and repeating her words, "I am not cruel, only—thoughtless;" said no more; —and she looked up in his eyes, read sorrow there, read love —and she smiled, he thought, with the kindest smile she had ever worn. "Come," she said, taking his hand, leading him, "I want to show you my little kittens. They are such dears!" It was this extraordinary variableness that had taken him captive. The sudden change almost took his breath away. Its purport, too, was quite out of his way. Here, again, the childhood was predominant; and he would not barter that for any rare quality. In his eyes it made her character simply perfect, and it accounted for the faults. He loved to dwell on this last thought.

She conducted him to the important family group of which she had spoken, and he tried to look properly impressed. One of the maid-servants stood, critical, military, observing her young mistress thus exhibiting her fancy stock, and his lordship, who detested such *espionage*, remarked, "Don't you think we had better go and look for Mr Masheter,—he will wonder what has become of us?"

"Yes; and we will take my kittens to show him. You shall carry them."

He was about to say he would rather not, but, happily, thinking better of it, and remembering the peculiar young lady he had to do with, he complied, not, however, very successfully; there might or might not be an etiquette attached to kitten-carrying. He evidently failed at the first attempt, for Miss Louise somewhat impatiently exclaimed, "Not like that; you're as awkward at it as my cousins!"

Lord Gascoyne certainly could not fancy those stalwart farmers employed in the gentle office of kitten-carrying.

In this imposing order they joined Mr Masheter, who was not the man to toss cheap irony at his relative in consequence; on the contrary, he admired the little things, and remarked, "How I should like my daughter to see them, she is so fond of pets!" Always thinking of her first, poor wounded bird, she was the very life and soul of his hourly thought.

Louise relieved his lordship of his charge and invited the gentlemen indoors.

"And how is my friend, Mr Clark?" asked the landlord, with his usual pleasant affability.

"Quite well, sir, thank you; my uncle will be in to tea shortly, and will be truly glad to find you here." This hostess-like speech was uttered with demure propriety. Without a doubt Louise behaved well enough when she liked, only—she so very seldom liked.

"And that odd pair—Beavers you called them, I think—do they take tea shortly also?" That odd pair had not made a favourable impression upon Lord Gascoyne.

"Oh no," laughed Louise, "they have gone. They did not come to any arrangement with uncle, I don't know why. We have no one in the house now."

"No one—your cousins——"

"Oh yes; I was not thinking of them." He watched with the intensity of pain, and he learned that that carelessness was natural.

"Would you like to look at my album?"

"I should, if a portrait of yourself is within."

"Yes; and you shall have one for carrying my kittens." Lord Gascoyne looked across to his relative as much as to say, "Did you ever see such a girl?" The relative replied with a look significant of his genuine liking for this same girl. The album was brought, Louise sat herself down upon a hassock at his feet, and proceeded to introduce while he turned over the book as it lay upon his knee.

"This is uncle John—and I do love him!"

"Good gracious!" said his lordship to himself; such enthusiasm was very foreign to him,—he hoped it was not going through all the family.

"And this is cousin Joseph. Now, don't you think Joseph like my uncle; a little more good-looking, being younger, that is all?"

The gentleman making acquaintance with the family bit his lip and turned over the leaf.

"Now, this is cousin Richard, and a dear good Richard he is; I *do* think the dearest and goodest cousin I've got. One

of these days I shall go mad, I know I shall, trying to solve which of them I love the best!"

"You're fond of photographs," said Lord Gascoyne to his relative, while he abruptly rose; "take my place, there's a good fellow."

"Now I do believe," said Louise, piqued, or pretending to be, "that is because I was praising cousin Dick."

"Dick!" muttered the nobleman to himself, with nausea, walking to the window. Mr Masheter advanced; he would pour oil upon the troubled waters; his smile was paternal and kind, and he was used to smiling kindly.

"Let me see your cousins, my dear; there is something truly interesting, I think, in collections of portraits."

Lord Gascoyne noticed that Louise was standing now. Her former attitude at his feet had won upon him. She proceeded, somewhat pacified—

"This, you will know, is cousin Charles; he gave me this album, he is *so* warm-hearted."

"The devil!" No; it must have been fancy surely? Mr Masheter looked hastily in the direction of the window, and was seized with convenient coughing.

"And here we come to cousin Thomas—poor old Tom—I *do* lead him a life!"

There was a noise at the window, the gentleman looking out had accidentally kicked the wainscot. A kick at the wainscot will indicate irritability as soon as anything. Louise looked shyly at Mr Masheter, and he reprovingly shook his head at her, but the lovely smile she disarmed him with, was never to be forgotten. The gentleman in a huff lost that.

"Cousin James! I call him my St Bernard, he *will* follow me about so, and when I come to boggy places he does love to lift me over." A crash of broken glass—Lord Gascoyne had put his elbow through Mr John Clark's best-parlour window. The cause of it uttered a tiny scream, tossed her cousins over, and rushed to the scene of the catastrophe. "I do hope you have not cut yourself?" asked with breathless anxiety, and while half afraid to look. This solicitude was very genuine, and he was very grateful for it. He was quietly reassuring her when a voice from mighty lungs was heard across the

garden and coming from the yard, "Their horses are in the stable; we shall find 'em indoors I daresay." Soon there were heavy steps heard, the courtyard rang with them, and the sturdy farmer marched in to find the visitors, to whom he gave cordial greeting.

"How's the stock, Clark?"

"Never better, sir."

"And the prize ox to be?"

"Hope to enter for the Show, nothing preventing."

"I came over more particularly to get you to sell me a couple of your fine Alderneys, Mary——"

Mr Masheter was interrupted by the coming in of the seven big helpers, a ceremony not unattended with commotion. Burly though they were, they were not without a certain rough courtliness, and their pleasure was conspicuous upon meeting the squire.

"We thought Lord Gascoyne was here?" said Philip, casting a slightly uncomfortable look around.

"Ay, to be sure," and his father looked inquiringly at Mr Masheter.

"Well, he has just broken your window, and I think he is walking off the annoyance it has caused him."

This is how he was *talking* it off.

"Now, have I really got you in a sufficiently grave mood to listen to reason?"

She interlaced her hands in front of her and walked beside him down that retired laurel-walk, looking as sensible as any young lady could look. He thought he might never get her to look as sensible again, and took advantage of it.

"I am about to tell you what you, no doubt, already guess—am about to put a question to you, entreating an answer in all seriousness, according to your heart's dictation. I love you very dearly—can you love me in return? I am brief, advisedly, more so than I admire, but it is matter of difficulty finding you so thoughtful and quiet as at the present moment." Then with what intensity he awaited the answer. And with what arch seriousness she replied to him.

"There are seven such questions out already," she said; "what can I say to *them?*"

CHAPTER XXXV.

IN DANGER.

FEW poets ever brought to London more sweet unsullied song, more clinging to first ideals, than Archie Campbell.

There was heroism in his aspiration and hope; he came with a great soul singing language of the stars, and a human heart full of sympathy with life.

Melodious, with an intensity beyond melody, his polished verse was ever a model of graceful composition; the depth of thought equal to the play of fancy. The man is not to be judged with barren paucity of appreciation because he stepped into our affections out of a pawnshop; the poet is not to be measured and weighed by our miserable scale of measurement and weight because he is a poor, slight, moneyless one! We have not to do with the frail casing of so easily hurt a body, nor with the grand vivid countenance, pensive, sad, with a wonderful look of longing, yet always bright with genius and flashes of thought that seemed to light up the face with the very royalty of the soul! It is the soul we have to do with here. No matter if he has wanted a meal, we may blush with shame that it should have been so; but it is with the fact that this unknown one has written what will not die with him, should we allow him to die of hunger—that he will die singing, for his soul is full of music, and he is higher far than we who have to appraise his divine gifts.

Has not the age wearied yet of the long reign of oversensuous melody? It is not time, perchance, for such cold and sparkling music, such chaste and stately lyrics, as this solitary singer offereth?

Undoubtedly there are those that admire him; nobody sings quite to himself, although whether the audience is large enough to keep body and soul together is another matter. His serene and dignified composure was a revelation to these. There was nothing excitable; it was the repose, the calm, which startled them, as compositions of infinite depth and quiet do startle in this feverish age. And men were dazzled by the chivalry, while women were charmed with the tenderness; and they paused at their work and their pleasure while a harp stole into their midst—stole through valleys of flower-strewn meadow tracts, stole over the heather and down from the mountains, stole clear and silvery as the sheep-bells on far hillsides, where he had graduated, God and his mountain heights whereby to measure his standard. No wonder the soul and the song grew mightily.

Ardour, fire, lights up the eyes as he presses forward for the great metropolis bespattering his banner until the sweet and stately face of his muse is flushed by reason of his blushes. He still presses on as living for the far-seeing hope of the beyond; but the light is very low in his eyes, and, could his mother see him, it would break her heart. What is possible immortality to those who love us as mothers love? It is present bread-and-cheese they would see us have! The sinews strong, the front robust, the eyes clear, the step elastic, the spirits buoyant—what though one reached by standard of the soul to the gods! "Whom the gods love die young!" It is fatal ambition. "The path to immortality is daily watered by our tears." Thus said Mary Stuart, that woman of sad majesty, that Queen of triple sorrow, who came to awe, to thrill, by imperious command of all that lives upon the soul.

No one possessing refinement could rise from the study of Archie Campbell's poetry without feeling elevated and refined, and no thought of grossness, no sentiment lowering to purity, no abasement of the reverent, ever crossed his mind, still less appeared in his verse. Of course the number who appreciate this is very few; but the larger circle detected that perfection of manliness—gentleness; and even as it always has something

winning about it this gentleness also won him friends, which is not to admit that they would have formed a committee to save him from the workhouse! Good people nowadays are chary about assisting the muses. Poets especially are self-supporting. A poor weak student like Rupert Redland might delicately give of his little all, realised of forfeited treasures; but the wealthy would never have done any such thing, the argument being—"Let this poet get employment; then, if in his leisure he commendably writes instead of spending his evenings at the casino, we will patronise his praiseworthy application, and make up a little subscription to help him." And the stuff thus produced of the fag-end of weary days would have been good enough for them, over which to chatter approvingly as they would over the shoe-black brigade, or any other irregular institution fostering under the wing of philanthropy.

This was not quite Archie Campbell's idea of the province of the poet; he might have been born two or three centuries too late, but it was distinctly not his idea. He believed the poet should inspire the people with lofty heroism, with a fine endurance, with noble resolve, with unquestioning devotion. That he should be found in every home, the pulse of the nation throbbing in unison, little ones lisping his name in the household, youths and maidens chanting his sweet utterance at their work, men and women talking his pure sentiments at the board, the old people in the ingle-nook smiling to hear prattlers making free with his ballads. He did not yearn for golden popularity—did not desire to see his thoughts so elaborately produced and garnished with such splendour that they became a mere medium for the display of art; or to be read in public by men mighty of speech, and quoted on all sides by the great. His ambition was to enter as an influence into the midst of the people, it was to be nestled to the heart of the forlorn and those in despair, it was to lighten the sorrows of those needing sympathy, it was to elevate the downcast unto high thought and noble purpose. All this was in the young genius before London had worn him to thin, pale, hopeless lassitude.

Sometimes walking home disconsolate, there again flitted before him the memory of those beautiful creations that figured in his poems; and they encouraged him, those shadowy cherished ones,—none the less beautiful for being locked away in the poor desk—like his face, so often saddened, but never losing its gentle beauty.

Etta Lute had not lost interest in her brother's unfortunate friend Rupert, and often questioned him concerning his welfare. Upon one of these occasions she was surprised to be answered in this wise: "You have frequently heard me speak in glowing terms of him—so glowing, I do not know if words are left wherewith to describe Rupert's friend, another unfortunate; poor, alone, dreamy, scarcely of this world, he is so beautiful!"

"My dear Theodore!"—for this was an unusual introduction even for her brother.

"It is true, my sister. If I exhausted language when praising Rupert, a new language must be invented to do justice to his friend. A young poet from Scotland, sad, made melancholy by disappointment, yet upon whom the sombre grace sits more majestically than imperial purple; but his face! Oh, Etta darling, I must never let you see it lest you think of nothing more from that time forth!"

"I must say you arouse my curiosity, and more, my pity, to hear that he has been unfortunate."

"He has known great trouble in London, to which he came full of buoyant hope, and from which he will go bitterly disappointed unless some special influence interposes. The little aid I am enabled to render will not avail unless other and more powerful friends take him by the hand; that is what is wanted—practical support, timely encouragement, a fair, kind, placing of his work before the world. A volume or two published by an obscure publisher, upon whose shelves his poor books lie dust-hidden; a few fugitive poems, in respectable yet second-rate journals; a box full of dead, splendid imagery and fancy—this is useless! And the composer may starve, and will starve, after which the dull world with tardy justice discovers that A POET is dead!"

"Kind words may at least do something towards sustaining the sinking courage."

"They will do much."

"Then bring him home with you to spend an evening, with his friend who has been so long in coming."

It pleased Theodore Lute very much, for he was really eager that his kind mother and sister should see this particular pair in whom he experienced so affectionate an interest. Yet the proposal required thoughtful consideration, for it was no slender love united them, and the brother paused in taking upon himself the responsibility of beginning so easily an acquaintance which none can ever see the end of. Then arose the two candid faces, unspeakably frank and honest-looking, so pitifully bereft of their sunshine, and he thought if he could restore a little of that it would be a good deed which should bring harm to no one, and might shed happiness. So he went to his mother, and with the delicate courtliness always characterising his demeanour towards her, asked permission to bring home two friends to spend the evening with them, and receiving the usual kind assent, he, a day or two afterwards, introduced them to the inmates of the villa.

Sensitive Rupert trembled when invited to accompany his good friend to Highgate, for somehow in his rarer dreams he had been fancying lovely things of a certain one with a musical name—had created for himself, to bear him company, a vision of exceeding fairness and of the gentle ministering regard befitting angels. It was Theodore's fault; he should not have dwelt so fondly upon that description of his sister. But the coat with the worn facings and threadbare sleeves! It seemed for a moment that he could not go; but that inborn dignity which impelled him, at all hazards of wounded sensibility, to continue at the Club, influenced his acceptance. And he, with Archie, and their partner, Poverty, attended upon the wishes of Theodore Lute, Esquire, accompanying him to the elegant home of his mother. Then did Archie Campbell meet with the nearest approach to those graceful and lovely ideals which imparted being to his finest poems. The girl might have descended from a star, she seemed so unlike any he had ever seen; the

sun-dashed, heaven-painted mists of mountain torrents, whereby he had so often sat and dreamed of something not of earth, had never yielded fantasy half so fair; so they looked at one another, large-eyed, intent, and wondering, a languid significance of look in each, the burden of which might have been "At last!"

Undoubtedly had his friend not appeared, Miss Lute would have been completely charmed with Rupert; but who, when Archie Campbell was present, could have eyes for any other? An unkind predicament, that unfortunately did not bear with it the preservative to Rupert, who likewise found to his cost that this sweet sister not only realised, but by far exceeded, those imageries he had taken the trouble to conceive, and then could not get rid of. Surely these young people had not gone out of their way as far as Highgate, on purpose to be made unhappy! It would indeed be a revenge of the stars upon this poet for his oft-presumptuous looking upward—his skyward flight lyre-laden!

Archie Campbell upon being asked by Mrs Lute to repeat from memory one or other of his shorter poems, did so with the modest grace which rendered him so delightful a companion. And beautiful Etta, for the first time, heard lyrics of the heart rendered with emotion, and a tenderness of pathos that left its echo for ever. Still she thought them melancholy. True; it was the primary beauty of his poetry. In the plaint of its music consisted its charm, in the stately measure of its sadness reposed the spell that made it deathless. He was very far, however, from burying his muse in any roughly-hewn sepulchre; rather was it enshrined in a cenotaph of magnifical completeness, a third grace of immortelle and cypress, worthy to rank with the imperial requiems of Lycidas and Adonis; an honour worthy the dying for, a fame gods and men might envy. To Theodore, who owned the gentle heritage of sympathy, there was no mystery in the sad sweet song at times quivering upon the harp.

It was very rose-hued, sitting in that luxurious drawing-room, voicing innermost feeling to those appreciative and entranced ones; but there was a long dark walk ahead, to

scanty fare, and meaner comfort, which even the lovely eyes of Theodore's fair sister failed to banish from their memory. Cold and cheerless poverty! Yet Archie would not forget this dainty chamber, nor the first glimpse caught of her, when, at an oriel, clustered thick with the white flowers framing it, he saw the face that dwelt henceforth with his dearest ideals. The picture lived amidst the rugged Highland scenes that revisited him in dreams. Life is loftier for the pictures hung in memory, while they be chaste, sincere, unspoiled. They are a charm in waste unpictured hours, vivid as the dreams in youth, when pictures are so many and so golden.

Environed by the pain and care of life, such are distinct as a child's hand, uplifted through the ghastly gleam and pale faint glitter of the surf at night.

Have you seen the grey stone lion, couched upon the gateway of an ancient dwelling, encircled by passion-flower? So we encircle the immovable unchanging thing called Life with delicate trails of fancy that do not alter it, yet serve to soften the grim outline and suggest some tenderer form. The recumbent grandeur of that called Life, or Lion, or Sphinx, or what-not we please to term it, remains unalterable, but there is some submission to tenderness, and this is conciliation.

Listen to the soft language of the plantations, as one by one the leaves drop to be noiseless for evermore: it is the final utterance, the sad farewell; often musical when stirred by the gentle breeze, or played on by light rain; they will not rustle around the birds again, nor tremble to the star-beams loving them, and their last utterance is more filled with melody than all. The sensitive call it melancholy, the insensible call it bitterness; but those birds, around whom their friends die one by one, leaving them alone, unsheltered and unsupported, deem the melody as full of meaning as the call to a sunnier clime.

Sometimes our poet entered the mystical realm of fantasy. And in this ideal world, where poet is king and artist is creator, he would weave of baseless fabrics the finest of his song-successes. Another of his subtle artist-traits was contrast, one of the chief, although far from being the most delicate

ingredient of effect and expression. Thus: a pale English girl in relief from a dim depth of aisle and cloister, twinkling lights of an altar falling upon her face, until, saint-like, it flashed upon one, to fade in a moment or to live for a life, according to the receptive faculty of the reader. The face of Etta, whereto the light of large wax-candles lent soft radiance, seemed like one of these altar-faces of his, whereby, not to which, he would worship devotionally.

Rupert Redland and Archie Campbell walked back after that pleasant evening, for the simple reason that neither had about him the money to defray the cost of a ride. It did not trouble them, they were used to it; and they experienced so much delight in being in one another's society, the length and tediousness of the walk were diminished,—companionship makes so great a difference. They did not talk much about their visit, each possessing too fine a nature to bare the actions of those who were kind to them to the barbarism of after-criticism; each was delicately sensitive to the impression upon himself and the impression upon his friend of the fair sister of Theodore. Yet, inasmuch as this was their first visit, there were some points of interest and admiration each felt privileged to speak upon, and confidences were interchanged. These but served to unite them in stronger ties of esteem and fraternal love; there was no thought of rivalry, not the shadow of a difference. Rupert did not even bear in mind the incident that Etta had no eyes for him, but only for his friend; he would not have had it otherwise; Archie was so unapproachable in his own eyes he would have felt downright wounded had he not been so in the eyes of others. When they parted the clasp of their hands had never been warmer, and in the clear gaze of the good-night look there was nothing lurking to spoil its frank affection.

The poor lodgings seemed doubly cheerless upon returning to them that night. He looked around, trying to place some of the pictures recently quitted upon these bare walls. Archie's strength was of slight account: he had taken little at Mrs Lute's; the walk home exhausted him; he was feeling low and faint when his landlady, an elderly woman, entered with some

oatmeal-porridge, and warm milk. She knew his partiality for the dish—judged he would be glad of it after being out so long; he was generally very regular, coming home at an early hour. How kind he thought this motherly attention! He caught her hand gratefully and thanked her with emotion. "My mother would bless you for this, did she but know of it. I don't know what had come to me but for your guid aid. I am late—a tryst wi' twa friends kept me—an' I'm verra weary."

"Sure, now, an' you looks poorly; put your curls back, so, and let me feel your head! Ah, it's hot it is, beating like my heart! I'll just run down and make you a cup o' tea. I'm glad you're back, though."

He laid a thin hand upon her strong red wrist, "Is there any letter?"

Asked so wistfully as almost entreatingly, he hungered for some favourable answer from one or other of the publishers; his hope rested on it, nay, his very life hinged on it.

"Yes," she said, taking a long blue envelope from her pocket, "I've brought ye one at last, sir; and may it hold good news, for it's long ye've waited for it."

The hot blood rushed to his face and imparted hectic loveliness, his lips were white with the agitation racking him, he had indeed waited long for it, and now could scarcely summon the courage to open it. The hand holding it was trembling so he could not read the superscription,—the colour of the thing was indistinguishable,—a painful feeling was at his throat; he could hardly entreat she would go and procure the tea. He could not open it while any living soul was by. She went, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron; she remarked the terrible strain, and her heart was wrung, for she loved him.

When she had gone he tried to hold it firmer, then placed his hand hard upon his heart, mechanically trying to stay the awful fluttering; he was not thinking of it, his whole soul was absorbed upon the issue of this communication. Feverishly he tore it open, caught sight of his old manuscript, unseen all the many weeks it had been absent, and he could not go on for some few minutes. Yet it could not be anything so cruel. The poems were returned for alteration here and there? Some

courteous explanatory note must be included? He was obliged to look for it,—must, or how would he know where to make the suggested alterations. He handled them as we handle things which burn. He prayed to God in his heart, agonizingly; in that brief instant he placed before his Creator the sorry fate that had befallen him since leaving the dear North, and all the horrible dread filling him if this *should* prove disappointing. But he could not believe it would; and removing the manuscript from the envelope, noticed, with a pang, how the pieces sent away so neatly were now upside-down, rolled round anyhow, and tied with a rough piece of packing-string. Yes, the letter was enclosed, and with a quaking fear he read the lithographed death-warrant:—

> "*Messrs —— & —— have returned Mr Campbell's poems, which have been under consideration, and they regret to find the opinion of their Reader is not sufficiently favourable to sanction the publication of the manuscript.*"

"Eight months' suspense, and *this!*" he moaned.

His head drooped, his hand hung listless. When the woman entered she thought him insensible; he was suffering, it was all inwardly, and it was so great the action of the body was powerless. But although he did not move he looked up when she drew near. "Ill news, I can see," she said; "but take courage, better luck next time."

"I depended on it for paying ye," he murmured, "I am so indebted; and now this, like ilka thing else, has failed me. It strack me dumb, I couldna think it real; and the sicht o' thae writings amaist bring tears to my een!" He lifted them suddenly, and imprinted a passionate kiss upon them; unthankful though they were, like ingrate children they were yet wondrous dear. The woman was much affected by this demonstration of emotion. She turned away, and with a trembling voice said, "I am but a poor woman, having only the lodgings to support me, but while I've a home you are welcome to share it with me, and shall never want for bed and board."

"Ill news, I can see," she said; "but take courage, better luck next time."—PAGE 366.

"Na, dearie," he answered, with so soft, so sad a voice, it could be scarcely heard, "I will go to work, at something; give up the hope of this; quite settled now. I hear, or seem to hear, my mother imploring it, and I will lean no longer on this that has betrayed me; all my life has been bound up in it, and my heart seems breaking."

It was a wail of plaintive despair. She dropped upon one knee, and putting a kind firm hand on each shoulder of his, said resolutely, "You—shall—not—go—from—here, for work or anything else: you are ill, I am a strong old woman; and I—*I*—will do the work." It was magnificent, that unselfish devotion of a poor untutored woman, earning daily bread by honest labour, and the recording Angel would write no fairer deed that night in the length and breadth of London city. It moved him greatly. To please her he appeared to assent, simply removing one of the hands from his shoulder, and gently bearing it to his lips. And for days he was pledged to his assent, through weakness. Unable to leave his chamber, his wan beauty piercing her to the heart when she came to see if she could do any little thing to please him or to aid in his recovery. The knowledge that he must, himself, do something more than dream to gain the merest mouthful, to keep the life his mother loved—for *her* sake,—*his* interest in it was gone—that, more than anything, restored him to himself. A sunny day, a September day, a memorable day, he walked slowly down the stairs, and out on to the crowded pavement. He had been wont to wonder whether he would ever walk these streets with the light step of success, and the quickness of pleasant business. And now this slow-toiling progress was a ghastly travesty on the old expectancy, a very sorry rate of progress wherewith to seek employment in the very midst of successful business people; how would he be able to ingratiate the minute scrutiny? He could not hurry, even for dear life—was too faint and sick at heart; but he went on by degrees, quivering to the rough jostling of the crowd, and feeling the bitter consciousness of being utterly unfit to commence the battle.

But it had to be done. He knew not which way to turn

to seek the necessary work. If possible, with a touch of the old fondness, he would gain employment for his pen. He entered the office of a NOTARY, and asked to see the principal. A hireling in charge—hand in pocket, jingling a few small coins, idling his master's time over a sporting paper—told him there was no principal—they were all equal—and tossed his head up with contempt at the pitiable object pleading to see a principal there, where all were equal. Mean as the thing was, it depressed the being in quest of work several degrees. He left the place, having made an enemy. The hireling was red-haired and freckled, the other was beautiful as Hyacinthus.

He saw upon a plate, REGISTRAR OF BIRTHS AND DEATHS FOR THE DISTRICT; and the place seemed tolerably in unison with his feelings. He knocked, and was admitted to an office-like room, where a keen-sighted old man peered over his spectacles in anticipation of a fee. But when the visitor announced the purpose of his mission, the old man very soon showed him that the Registrar of a District was not to be trifled with.

Close by he read, SEWERS BOARD—SECRETARY'S OFFICES, and made another attempt at this not over-inviting retreat. Two very stern-looking youths were writing with quill-pens, which they held as upright as themselves. A stern-looking man of middle age, writing with a still more upright quill-pen, just glanced at him, and continued his stern occupation. Poor Archie Campbell vainly waited for one or other to address him, or abate that stern uprightness. The Sewers Board altogether ignored any such wretchedly unofficial presence; and the slender unknown retreated, more and more humbled and frozen, more and more impressed with his own nothingness.

A little further on discovered the COLLECTOR OF POOR'S RATES; and he thought this must surely be a man of some feeling and commiseration. He called upon the Collector. Ushered into a semi-writing, semi-reception room, the Collector attended upon his pleasure immediately. He was a sharp, piercingly sharp, individual, who seemed to go through

one like a pointed rod of iron—eminently a man with whom it would be dangerous to play any tricks. He went through Archie Campbell, heard what the plaintive voice had to say, and went through him again and again, while expressing his indignant surprise that any young man in his right senses could call upon him with such an errand.

Civil refusals would have been hard enough to bear; but the harsh inhuman method of reply vouchsafed to his earnest, anxious, perfectly respectful representations, chilled and horrified him.

Serious as were the rebuffs, he persevered, suffering. His reserve of strength and courage growing fainter, it was necessary, indeed, to put something before his mind's eye to cheer him onward. Of old it had been the poems, but they had played him false. He could do so no longer. Instead thereof he placed the picture of that girl, flitting upon his musing like a spirit of good; and it served to support him—supplied the antidote to the dread thoughts oppressing him, as the memory of good should do. A far more genteel professional site confronted him, over wider steps and loftier area railings. Upon its door was an imposing name, at its window two words of doubtless solemn import—GENERAL ACCOUNTANT. He did not quite know what that meant, but did know it was something in the family connection of writing and figures. He detested the latter with the legitimate ardour of the true poet, but would accept them thankfully now that *that* had failed, and bread was wanted.

The General Accountant was just balancing an account, and kept him waiting while, with punctilious care, he completed the calculation, ruled it off, and closed the book. Then his hand came down sharp upon its hard drab cover—"Now, young man!" The imperiousness of this address caused poor Archie to shrink; suffering, in anticipation, another curt dismissal. With a composure the outcome of desperation he explained his position, and his willingness to accept occupation at however poor a salary. At that the man of figures turned upon him decisively. "It's that beggarly principle of doing work for a mere nothing that keeps in-

dustrious young English fellows out of office. I've no patience with it. One of your countrymen stepped bang over my head some years ago, and I've hated the Scotch like poison ever since,—I hope I always shall, as long as I'm a Christian!"

Any one but a General Accountant or a parochial overseer would have melted before the sublime mournfulness upon the sweet youthful face. He stepped softly out, thinking King's Cross Christianity differed somewhat from the first principles learned of a loving mother, and often expounded in their peaceful kirk. And now he began to feel too sick at heart to go further; but the longing desire to get *something*, and with the dread, nay, inward conviction that he could not repeat the sickening ordeal upon the morrow, he dragged his lagging steps onward until he saw another place, and read, CENTRAL LOAN OFFICE; and the name of it struck him as mocking, to begin with.

He looked wretched enough to need an immediate loan, and he bore upon his face refinement that gave promise of the most exacting security being available; therefore one of four respectable miscreants came forward with politeness to ascertain his business. Encouraged by the false appearance, and leaning upon it with intensity of gratitude pitiful to witness, Archie eagerly explained. The man drew in his breath, with a sound expressive of wonder at this evidence of the extremity to which misfortune can go, when an intelligent and evidently gifted young man offers his services, for a mere pittance, to a fraternity preying upon those as wretched as he, and with security.

"Our office is well supplied with clerks. I am sorry I cannot employ you; but if you happen to be in want of money, and refer us to two respectable householders willing to become security, we will oblige you with a small loan, just to tide you over present troubles."

He shook his head sadly. He knew nothing of such perilous tiding over; but the instinct of honour was large in his soul, and this discountenanced any such borrowing. He left the place and the street—made for the busier paths. The noise

was awful—jarred him, and caused his head to ache badly; yet, in spite of it, he experienced relief to be quit of the grim line of oppressive places he had just left.

Shops, public-houses, stalls, and barrows, women with baskets, shoe-blacks, eating-houses, oyster-rooms, railway parcels-offices, pawnbrokers' shops, depots for surgical appliances, herbalists, cigar-divans, hairdressers, florists, glove, scarf, and collar emporia. Archie passed on bewildered. Of what use would he be to a tradesman, ignorant of any trade? What occupation offered through the long line bearing right and left of him? Surely he could be of use in one of the lighter businesses. He made a bold attempt—entered one of the glove and scarf stores. Girls stood along the counter, looking full at him with bold and confident gaze, causing his cheeks to tingle. Enjoying his confusion, and admiring his beautiful countenance, they stared the harder, and telegraphed to a brazen pair who were making fancy bows at an inner room. These came forward upon pretended excuse, and stared likewise. He had on a very old pair of gloves, which his landlady had mended until they were past mending. Little things please little minds; and these gloves set the girls tittering. Then one of them demanded what they might show him. He asked, in return, if the proprietor was disengaged, and could he speak to him for a minute or two. One of the girls went to that person, and he left a cash-desk of highly polished wood to speak with the young man. He was a dapper gentleman, bombastic, with a crushing, annihilating manner about him to any one not a customer. Archie Campbell found it more difficult speaking before all those bold-looking girls than he had done at any previous place. He plucked up his courage, and, with an ever-deepening glow, commenced with the past, judging it the honest, proper method. Directly he began to mention books, the proprietor stopped him abruptly, with this angry denunciation, "I don't want any! I'm taking one in; it's been going on ever since I was a boy, and I suppose won't stop till I'm an old man. Nothing to-day, thank you." And he spun round, teetotum-fashion, and went back to his desk, where, seated upon a high stool, he vindictively eyed the young

man's retreat. Then, standing up upon the bars of his stool, he addressed himself, in a tone of much annoyance, to the rank, —"If you girls encourage that young fellow to come here again, I'll discharge the lot of you!"

Again disappointed—and this time considerably mystified—Archie, with despondent heart, stood pausing, hesitating what to do. Suddenly strains proceeding from a side street put new life into him. It was simply a poor man playing upon a cornet; but the air was "Highland Mary," and it seemed like a voice from home. He pursued his way better after that.

He made one more attempt at a shirt and glove warehouse. He chose the trade, believing it involved less tax upon the strength and previous acquaintance than did many. It belonged to a woman of lax morality, audacious assurance, and infamous hardihood; and she took a fancy to the handsome unfortunate instantly, listening to his plaintive account with pretended sympathy, and awaiting, impatiently, his references, —for even she was not going to risk her till. When she learnt he must be taken as his own reference—taken for what he was worth—taken for any remuneration she deemed just—it altered the aspect, even to her. Admiration was one thing —but he must be left in the shop sometimes—and satisfaction behind her back was another,—admiration itself, resting very largely upon prosperity. She told him that she could not avail herself of his services; and he went out staggering, the crowded street, the vehicles and horses, the opposite houses, whirling, then growing misty before him. And he fell by the curb of a thronged corner, his fair head low on the dirty pathway, its curls trodden on by a quick-passing stranger, who had not time to avoid his foot's descent, nor time to stop and see what was the matter; for he hurried off as though he was leaving the plague behind him. There was business to attend to, and people with business to attend to cannot be expected to see after people tumbling about in the streets. What are the parish doctors for? or, if they are engaged, the idlers, who have no business to attend to, and who like this sort of thing? And it was just these who did attend, in large num-

ber, although not one of them offered to raise the poor victim, —a gaping crew of brutal lookers-on, with no hand amongst them extended to keep back the pressure, or lift the head a mother deemed too rare a thing for the winds of heaven to visit roughly. They could stand staring at the perfect face, upturned to the blue sky, and the straying hair making that flagstone a royal pillow, but could not help, nor do other than look over each other's shoulders for the police, who would remove it thence. But the crowd was divided by a strong hand, and a majestic fellow, though no more than a carpenter, scattered it, raising the wan face tenderly, lifting the slight form completely off the pavement and supporting it in his arms, during which the police tramped to the spot to interfere. "What's up here? Who is that man?" they asked, officiously.

"My brother," replied Saul Weir, standing stalwart as any of them, and showing a noble face that caused the men to recede.

Without delaying another instant to parley, Saul Weir carried him in his strong arms a hundred yards to a cab-rank, where he placed him with exceeding carefulness in a vehicle, telling the driver his address, and entering to take his place beside the unfortunate thus opportunely rescued.

The motion of the vehicle brought him to himself; the colour was longer in returning, however. And with consciousness came embarrassment. Who was this kind friend supporting him with such marvellous gentleness—not Rupert? His first thought was of Rupert.

"Are you better?" How tuneful a voice, how soft the solicitous tone. Archie looked up into the face bending above him, and experienced that delicious sense of protection the weak, the delicate, the suffering know fully when, in loving hands of the strong and caring, they surrender to the blissfulness of depending entirely, without a thought or care, upon the ministering guardianship.

"I thank you, yes; I was taken ill in the street, I remember. I have not been well of late."

"Is your home *in* London?"

"I have been lodging near King's Cross, and left to seek for work, but met with such great discouragement it caused me to feel faint and low."

"Poor fellow! Well you are near my place now, and if you have no better friend in London, I promise you hearty welcome. You'll want nursing first, nourishing next, after which we shall be better able to consider what this work is to be; but it strikes me you've used the wrong word."

After recent experiences this seemed doubly thoughtful, and in Archie's sensitive condition affected him beyond the power of replying to. He could only smile, but the smile upon that face said more than words. And Saul Weir, who from the first saw that it was one of gentle rearing and refined nature, felt great pleasure in being thus enabled to prove a friend in need.

So they drove up to Saul Weir's house, where Daisy, just home from school, was on the look-out for him; and that cab caused her some consternation, catching a glimpse of the face she loved inside it. She ran up-stairs to the door, which Saul opened, explaining in a few words the occurrence, and in so low and quick a voice they were unheard by his patient. That poor mortal was carefully carried into the house by the same strong arms, and gently placed in bed in Saul Weir's room on the ground-floor. Returning to Daisy in the kitchen, he was met on the stairs by his housekeeper. "The gentleman from next door has called, Mr Weir, and asked whether you would mind taking in your tools, as they've some work they want done, when most convenient to you, sir."

"Certainly, I'll look in shortly; meantime make some gruel for our friend up-stairs. Where's Miss Daisy?"

"In her room, sir." It was true, the child had been shocked by sight of that deathly face. Saul went up to her and found her in tears. Daisy was very tender-hearted. He explained it more fully, and that their friend would soon be restored to more lifelike hue. Together they went in to him, and found a marked change already; and as the colour came back, tint by tint, and lustre revived in the eyes, both noticed then how distinct was the face from all ordinary faces—how, like some

exquisite painting upon ivory, its delicacy was of more than common type. And when gratitude lent animation, and emotion imparted softness, its sad beauty charmed them; they felt towards this fragile invalid thus strangely consigned to their care very warmly interested in his progress. It was not, however, until he was well enough to talk that they discovered his superiority, which was detected more certainly by the voice than in any other manner.

Standing by the bed, holding the white hand, warming it with his warmth of hand and heart, Saul Weir, while the large eyes looked up into his, felt strangely moved. He had never had a friend of his sex,—never known the grave pleasure of caring and being cared for; he had been essentially alone, hence the delight experienced when with Daisy, with whom, of course, this new feeling in no way interfered. And this feeling he could not account for; it was born of the liquid lovely glance up from the grateful happy eyes,—it looked him to the soul and seemed like the gaze of one from another world. It was all done in that instant of holding the hand, of meeting that upturned gaze. All great loves have instant birth; it is the little crawling sentiments that are put together in shuffling particle fashion.

"You will soon be better, my dear friend," murmured Saul Weir, cheerfully. "I am compelled to run in next door for a while, but leave this little girl to see you are well cared for." Lightly, playfully, perhaps to impress the invalid pleasantly, possibly with some dim presentiment, Saul Weir lifted her with a strong fond action, and kissed her, saying, "Adieu, sweetheart! don't leave our invalid till I return." Then set her upon her feet, nodded kindly to Archie, and strode away with the noble tread of manhood when most nearly in the image of his Maker.

They heard him go out, brisk and business-like, heard the steel music of his basket of tools, heard the peculiar soft touch with which he closed the shop-door, so that it should not jar the adjoining room—the closing of a door will reveal a character,—and then they heard no more.

Archie turned towards the little girl, it was like being in

heaven after all he had gone through, to rest thus, and with so sweet a child to look upon. The poetic are akin, and quick perception makes known the sympathetic. He *felt* she was bird-like, set quiveringly to music—could detect it. Such is learned of the spirit, and that never errs. So, "Will you read to me a little while, some poetry?" It was put appealingly, as though a thing his soul hungered for; the tone touched the girl, who, with great tenderness, complied at once, repeating from memory and with the true expression of the heart those lines she loved, "*To a Daisy found in London streets.*"

Spell-bound, he could only rest immovable, looking at the flitting expressions upon the pretty face, feeling and enthusiasm, tenderness and emotion, making these very eloquent. It was a wonderful surprise to hear his lines given their true meaning, the meaning alone possible when lines have sunk into a heart, and are made that heart's very own. Then he said "Thank you," in a strangely low voice; and, "you like the poem?" "I love it," she replied. And so she did, and saw no reason for disguising it. "So do I," he said simply.

She sat by the bed a long time, awaiting Saul Weir. Long after the housekeeper had brought up the gruel, which Daisy arranged temptingly upon a small tray, whereon a snowy cloth; long after the housekeeper knocked a second time with a message, "If you please, Miss, will you give me the book Mr Weir brought from Liverpool, with the writing inside the cover? he wishes to show it to a gentleman." The book was kept locked up, and Daisy was custodian. She suspected no treachery, and unlocked the drawer containing it, and gave it to the woman, who went away and gave it to the messenger. Long after these incidents: until the invalid passed into quiet sleep; she looked at the face, so still, and thinking—thinking a woven fantasy of the beautiful and the poetic; then arousing with a start, wondering why Saul did not return, and falling into further musing whereof Saul Weir stood king, by right of the heroic and the good.

How long he was in coming! He had bade her not leave the invalid until he returned, and she would not. But how long was he to be in coming?

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BLACK AND WHITE.

SAUL WEIR walked up to the firm's door with a light and ready footstep, showing a desire to do business and extend his area of usefulness.

He was admitted by Mr Wattle, who closed the door quickly. Mr Crick was at the down-stairs window, narrowly watching whether any passer-by or opposite neighbour noticed the carpenter's entrance.

"Come this way, Mr Weir," said the stout man, waddling to the end of the passage, and pausing to gather breath before he ponderously led the way down the stairs that conducted to the underground kitchen.

There is nothing remarkable about a carpenter being taken into the kitchen to execute his work, and Saul Weir followed without the slightest hesitation, rather pleased, indeed, at being the one employed on it.

In the kitchen they found a lighted lantern, and the stout man, catching it up, handed it to the carpenter, saying, "The work is for the cellar; I want you to fix a bench: you'll need a light, and we prefer a lantern 'cause there's a lot of ignitible things about." Saul Weir, who had seen enough ignitible things about for once in a life, thought the precaution prudent.

An outlet from the kitchen admitted to a spacious excavation under the pavement, in the centre of which was a speck of light upward; it was the lid of the coal-cellar, and the place was used for coal by the firm as by other householders. But herein had been dug a still lower place, damp and noisome, that was only used for rubbish or articles it was safer to stow

away for a time. Only the firm knew of its existence. The indefatigable Jebeson had been the well-paid architect, notwithstanding which, it was very much in the rough, as Saul Weir found. Kicking aside some lumps of coal, the stout man told the carpenter to pull up the door he would trace by the ring, and Saul Weir held the lantern low, greatly surprised at the existence of a door in any such place, and thinking it all in keeping with the peculiar opinion he entertained of the firm. But he was far from suspecting treachery. Why should he?

It was a massive trap-door which Wattle asked the other to lift. The lantern revealed steps roughly cut out of the earth. "You'll excuse my going down," said Wattle, "it fatigues me too much?" It was true; that was why he had been chosen to conduct their victim to this place. Saul could not object to going alone with any valid right while the painfully corpulent person stood panting and blowing upon its brink; so he pleasantly agreed, and made no trouble about going down by himself, although why they should want a bench fixed in such a horrid place he could not conceive. Saul preferred God's pure air, and held that it would enable you to work longer and work better, be the work manual or mental.

He was looking about him, at the mass of rubbish and strange disorder prevalent, wondering what a bench was to be fixed down there for, when he heard the trap fall with a dull heavy thud, and it struck him as singular. He, however, took a quick survey without troubling about that; probably the gentleman objected to the damp unpleasant smell, and so did Saul. He made his way quickly from side to side, and from end to end of this (as it seemed to him) underground vault-like receptacle for the debris of the universe. He cleared a space where the bench should go, and then went up the steps, to lift the door and fetch the wood, since there was none about. The door, however, resisted all his efforts to raise it, and by the peculiar firmness upon its four sides, he believed three bolts had been drawn to make it secure. He shrugged his shoulders disdainfully. It was clearly a conspiracy, and he began to bethink him *why?* Nothing that he could conceive of threw any light upon the motive; no deed he had ever done, nor word he had

ever said. It was mysterious in the extreme, and a tremulous feeling of apprehension took possession of him, while, with half-weary, half-contemptuous annoyance, he tried to unravel the black conspiracy. His hand strayed unconsciously to the basket of tools by his side, as though these were the sole friends that could help him. Calmly, and with grave deliberation, in spite of the indignant warmth he not unnaturally experienced, he looked this awful peril in the face; and the more he reflected upon it the more unreasonable did it seem, that these people should bear him any animosity, or that any motive should exist for a hostile feeling sufficient to warrant his destruction. Time went on, and the trust that it might all be accidental was destroyed by an appalling noise above, which continued for some time and extinguished every gleam of hope. He knew what it was: they were having in a large quantity of coals, certainly sufficient to last them six months. The weight of these was upon the trap, which it would thus be impossible for him to cut through, as he had intended doing—indeed would be compelled to do before he could escape. Then did Saul Weir look at his position solemnly: there was no consternation, but a great, solemn fear, that sent the colour back from his face, and beaded his brow with cold drops, wrung of that instant agony. There was no mistaking the doom—he had to meet a horrible death. The thought of escaping it seemed a ghastly mockery, it was so impossible. The close, noisome place in which they had thought fit to immure him was but too well adapted for its heinous purpose. Nevertheless, the magnificent courage he possessed in plenty determined him upon making a desperate effort to elude his fate. Breathing a prayer of earnest intensity that He would direct and help him, Saul commenced the work of self-deliverance.

First, to see to his light—the end of candle in the lantern would not last long—he removed the tallow from the remaining wick and immersed one end of the latter in his oil-can, into which he also put the tallow, so as to make a more serviceable lamp. The excavation was not improved by the new light shed upon it—an odious place, heaped with the strangest

jumble of relics a weird firm of brokers ever contrived to accumulate. He must lose no time, however, since in this foul spot it was endless night; and, like some watchman of old, this stalwart carpenter went groping about with his oil-tin fixed in the lantern. Hewn unevenly, the confined space looked larger than it really was; and as he held the lantern aloft and took keen inspection, he could not but feel disgust at the slovenly workmanship. None of those rifts or angles, however, opened up the merest cranny of escape. If rugged, the walls were solid, and black as cruelty itself: he looked high, looked low, but could discover no loophole affording any hope of ever quitting this living tomb. With his mallet he sounded the sides and roof: it was all as the pick had left it, and earth every inch of it.

At every step he trod upon some strange article or other, consigned to this dark hiding-place through motives of secrecy or crime, and many an old heirloom—once of value, doubtless, to wronged owners. He moved carefully, not to outrage those unknown ones by trampling their treasures under foot. Thus doing, he saw his light gleam on the contents of a rusty iron box, thrown down there, and fallen with lid open, while papers were lying in disorder. He looked at these curiously, for emblazoned arms had caught his attention. He lifted one, and discovered an elaborate seal and signature: he recognized the Spanish language, and he read, large and grand-looking, the word ZENAÏDE.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN GRATITUDE.

DAISY sat waiting a long and tedious time, and her friend did not return. Archie awoke, revived, refreshed, restored; and seeing the pretty, patient watcher, still at her post, taking shy glad glances at him, for she was feeling lonely and disconsolate, he began to talk kindly to her, with the moving softness that wins upon old and young. And Daisy confided her anxiety and surprise that Saul Weir should be so long, having only gone next door; it also struck Archie as singular, although his knowledge of the carpenter's custom was of very brief acquaintance. Then Daisy said she would just like to send in and ask how long Mr Weir would be. It met with the approval of her companion, and she did so. The servant returned with the message that Mr Weir had been wanted at the sale-rooms, and that he had gone on there some hours ago. With that they were fain to be content for a time again, but then Daisy could control her impatience no longer, and that kiss of his seemed to burn like the pleading to be remembered. She sent in again to ascertain where the rooms were situated, and they returned answer, in the New North Road. She did not know where it was, but shortly after she heard their neighbour Mlle. Bernardin's shutters going up, and she went to that kind-hearted person and told her all the truth, begging she would go with her to the New North Road. Mlle. Bernardin put on her dainty little bon net there and then, much touched by the child's confidence; understanding, moreover, how at such a time she needed a superior adviser to their domestic.

Daisy ran back to her patient, who was anxious that the motherly woman at his lodgings should know of his whereabouts, and that he was in good hands. She told him she had arranged for the servant to take a note there directly she returned, and bidding him good-bye, Daisy set out with her sympathetic neighbour. The child walked along in nervous haste, feeling a dread she could not account for nor explain. Adrienne, like a true Parisian, held high dislike for London streets, and she lost no time in conducting her little friend to the road named. They found the sale-rooms easily enough, and soon learned from the blear-eyed custodian that no carpenter or anybody else had been near since the morning, when one of the masters was there, talking of some alterations, and a bench or two to be fixed, and promising to send the carpenter round. "Which I've kept in for him," said the old man, "but never a carpenter's bin!" And they thought it very, very strange; began to be fearful, and did not like the look of it at all.

Adrienne Bernardin took prompt measures in the matter; for she entertained no small regard for her kind and handsome neighbour. She went immediately to the nearest police-station and narrated what had occurred, describing the missing one with a graphic faithfulness that would not leave much chance of Saul Weir's passing unrecognised should he appear. It was taken down in writing, and later on copies were despatched to the other offices. The lady, speaking aside to the inspector, said she would be responsible if any expense was incurred, and left her name and address. The men of the Essex Road beat had remarked the fine fellow recently opened in business, and this mysterious disappearance evoked much sympathy. They asked where he came from, and all about him, and ascertained that his actions were broad as the day, his principles open, fearless, and honest; there was literally no motive assignable for his disappearance; and foul play was spoken of. A couple of detectives called upon the firm. Crick was at the window, and saw them coming. They were in private clothes, but it was perfectly well known who they were. One of the workmen answered the door, and replied that his

masters were busy; at which point Wattle, as previously arranged, called from the office—a small room at the rear—"What is it, Jones?" To which Jones called back in reply, "Two gen'lem to see you, sir." Whereupon Wattle called again, "Then why don't you show the gentlemen in?" Jones did so, to the back room, where a very stout person, for a calculator, was in the midst of figures, and, evidently, considerable business. He looked up and nodded upon entrance of the gentlemen, then finishing an entry, filing an invoice, and plunging a quill deep in a salt-cellar filled with shot, he asked, "Now, gentlemen, your pleasure?" "Are you one of Jebeson, Wattle, and Crick; Brokers, et cetera?" inquired the elder of the two curtly. Mr Wattle replied that he was proud to say he was a member of the firm, and added that they were ready to do business with the gentlemen. "Yes," said the other of the two, "we are sure of it!" But whether this was said sarcastically or not could scarcely be determined, since the speaker was of a decidedly unprepossessing cast, and had a dry, crisp keenness about him eminently distasteful to the genial Mr Wattle. "Have you any objection to our seeing over the premises?" asked the same speaker, when the member of the firm without any hesitation said, "Not any." He touched a bell for an attendant, remarking, "I'm sure you'll excuse my going with you; I can't move about so quick as you young ones!" The bantering passed without producing a smile upon the impassive faces of the visitors, both of whom, by the way, were considerably older than the member of the firm. Jones waited upon his master's pleasure, and being instructed to take the gentlemen round, did so; and the place was narrowly examined from attic to basement, without any discovery to warrant the assumption of that house having been the scene of violence or crime. All this transpired upon the afternoon of the day following, up to which time no tidings of Saul Weir were received at the police-stations, or at his home.

Daisy's grief and anxiety allowed of but interrupted sleep, and Archie felt deeply for his little friend when, in the morning, she went in to tell him there was no news. He well knew,

of his own bitter experience, the mournful knell rung out by those two words. The sunken eyes, of late so sparkling, traces of tears shed all night long, her colourless cheeks and shaking hand, told how deeply this blow fell upon her. They had known how great, how good he was, but until now had not known *how* much to them. Archie tried to comfort her, and his was that gentle comfort which steals upon one soothingly. She listened with a sense of weary pleasure, but her sorrow kept uppermost in spite of it. That graceful melancholy of his came in better under such saddened feeling than would lighter and more cheerful manners. She sat by him, taken captive by the tenderness, and could any one have consoled the child, it was this invalid poet brought to her by Saul himself, and almost, as it would seem, in preparation for this sad parting. And when Archie spoke of going, so soon as well enough to leave the house, feeling great delicacy as to the peculiarity of his position there, she so earnestly pleaded, so passionately implored he would not leave her until Saul's return, he consented to remain there some time longer, and that at least made the child happier; and she sat down to write to her sister Ada an account of the moving incidents of the last few hours. Very glowing was Daisy's description of "the dear good young lady next door," and had Ada been at all of a jealous disposition, she would have felt this. Presently Daisy ran in to the milliner's, and was received as kindly as ever.

"Yes, my dear child; and now you are going to be my thoughtful little assistant: you will help me to trim hats, and fetch the things for me when I am dressing the window, setting tea while I serve the customers, and keeping the fire in when I am gone to the City; and you will like it very much, will you not?"

Thus she ran on, to please the child and occupy her mind; and out of gratitude Daisy tried to look content. But oh, how the little heart longed for his return, for the season of their nightly studies! It was this: the heart was full of aspiration and longing after wisdom, for the path she had walked hand in hand with him so delightfully, and with so great a measure of success.

"But I shall often run in next door, you know," said Daisy, thinking of her invalid, to whom she was becoming attached.

"Oh yes, for the present, until something definite is decided upon. I think it advisable, however, to have the shutters up to show that the proprietor is away and business cannot be attended to, it will avert the annoyance of people calling for nothing. But you will see one of these days Mr Weir will walk in as coolly as though nothing had happened!" This she said hopefully, taking a light and cheerful view of it; the little girl's face had clouded over sadly at the mention of putting the shutters up, a process simple of itself, but to the workers, the intensely human in humble ways, so significant of the mournful.

In the evening Daisy returned to her poet, who had passed a dull time of it; feeling better, he had got up and dressed himself. She knocked at his door, and the pleasure he experienced was manifest in the tone of his "Come in, my bairn." She entered, looking brighter and more herself. "I am glad to be back with you again," she said, innocently. The sincerity of it charmed him. "And I am glad, for you maun read to me." "If you please," replied the child, looking around for a book. "I am afraid all the books you will like are down-stairs. Shall we go down? It will be a change for you." He assented, and they went down into the kitchen-parlour below the shop, where she read to him—reading that rendered poetry into music, moving him as no other reading had ever done. And they talked; here was one to understand and sympathise with those poetical yearnings and dreamy fancies which she had thus far found no living soul to fully comprehend. Saul was too practical; and while admiring and feeling impressed by the beautiful unrealities, he yet could not be said to enter into them with the soul-earnestness characterising Archie Campbell. Saul Weir was essentially very real; it was one of the strong qualities of his nature, and that very principle led him to but half accept the poetic; half acceptance is not sympathy. In the paths of wisdom and of goodness, however, he was all her own.

An hour or more was spent thus delightfully, and it seemed

but a few short minutes; for if Daisy had never before found one in sympathy with her inner life, he likewise had never found one to whom to chant his beloved 'Burns,' or his own scarcely less sweet effusions.

When she had left him for the night, Archie turned gratefully to the books her thoughtfulness had provided him with. He had passed bad nights of late, and liked to shorten them: and he hated the darkness, so he determined to stay in the kitchen, which the fire and gas made cheerful. His soul was shrinkingly sensitive to gloom, to the weird, to terrors there is no accounting for, to the dim unlovely shadows creeping at times upon one and enveloping the soul as it were in similar darkness.

Some of these books were not the most cheerful of companions: odd purchases from out-of-the-way bookstalls, curious and quaint, and some of them very old. It was like human nature, to pick out the ones exciting curiosity most, and those affecting themes relating to strong antipathy, such as psychological phenomena, and the mystical and strange experience at times besetting the soul. Some records there, whether true or false, would have appalled braver men than he: how such came to be amongst the books of practical Saul Weir was a wonder, but really he did not follow the custom of reading a book pretty well through before he bought it, and, furthermore, he wished his reading to embrace all themes, and bought accordingly. There was lighter reading, but Archie Campbell, invalid-like, hit instantly upon one that was most calculated to depress and affright. He took a full digest of hitherto unthought-of horrors, feeling very shocked and wounded, and unable, as the robust might, to shake off the dismal influence. Then he lay upon the sofa, with no relish for the antidote as it may have existed in the dingy old works not yet dived into. Sensations more vividly mournful had never taken possession of him; a shuddering dread crept upon him, and fear in its supernatural sense. Of course it was owing to his weakness, to the over strain; it was the morbid sensitiveness, the prelude to the last tragedy of all.

After a while he put out the light to try and sleep, but hideous

forms peopled the darkness. Bathed in perspiration he wrestled with the imaginary horrors conjured up by his over-strung brain. He strove to think of those sweet lyrics hitherto ready at his bidding, but they seemed to have fled before these tormenting shadows! Then of the saint-like face of Etta, that also was shrouded! The child—surely her innocence should protect both her and him? In vain, they knew nought of it, and dragged her away. His friend, the good workman who had saved his life, rescued him from rough usage, literally raised him from the streets; he looked long at the well-remembered face and noble form, they would flee before that if before nothing else. And it was so, or some sounds then first heard routed them, or he saw them no longer; but with as painful intensity listened to some curious thuds upon the earth (for to him, in his overwrought state, they seemed to proceed from the earth)—it was such a noise he fancied, as would be made were a man digging a grave, or excavating a trench. Following upon the sensations he had experienced so liberally it added to the host of horrors. All was still without, not even a passing vehicle to break the monotony of that subterranean workman. It chilled this fragile watcher, awake, suffering, overcome by an undefined terror. What could it mean? What tremendous blows! It was as though some Titan was making his way upward. Then suddenly, plainly as ever he heard anything, in spite of its smothered, rumbling, and muffled knell, he heard his name, Campbell! Campbell! Mr Campbell!

He sat up on the sofa; his first thought was of his parents. Was it some supernatural call? Were they ill—dying? was trouble there? It thrilled him. What a call! the echo of it still seemed rising and trembling upon the air. The dull, solid, deadened blows continued as regular as before; not hurried, not uncertain, not purposeless, but with mighty aim and end, where the human mole groped upward to the light. Then again was heard that lusty shouting of his name, and this time he knew it to be a great human call for HELP! Nay, more, he recognized, or believed he did, the voice of that man whose hold upon his grateful memory and fond recollection was very strong.

Three times was the summons heard, then no more; but the sound of the work was distinguishable till the morning dawned. And all the night Archie lay a-thinking; it resolved itself clearly to him, and once seen thus became a divine mandate. He was called to help the man who had so nobly helped him. He felt very weak and slight to commence so stern a crusade, but he knew well that strength of heroism is in no way dependent upon strength of body. It was a sacred charge, and with sublime faith he accepted it. His friend, he was quite certain, needed his help, and he should have it. Here comes in the use of his poetry, for a matter-of-fact person would have ridiculed the idea, and left night-calls and sentiment to that wide sea which overflows the world —the darkness, and which should wash all such away. In the morning, much to her surprise, his young nurse found him still down-stairs. He greeted her with frank pleasure; she thought he looked more ill than on the day before, and anything but fit to be about.

"I am just ga'en to step in next door, Daisy, to ask if Mr Weir left the book there, that was sent for."

"Let me send in to ask. You had better not go outside, Mr Campbell."

"Thanks, dear; I'll go mysel. I maybe 'll gain some clue to our friend's singular conduct."

She raised no further objection when it appeared he was going in the interests of Saul Weir.

Admitted to the den of the three bears, he was received by the great bear, who looked at him searchingly over his puffy cheeks.

"Who are you?" he asked, bluntly.

"I am the lodger next door, by profession a writer. My landlord, Mr Weir, has left a sma' book here. If ye've done wi' it I wad like to hae it."

Wattle read every lineament of the candid and open countenance, and attempted to read the eyes; but with these he had no chance, they were so brilliant. He fidgeted with a short and stumpy penknife and a thick yellow quill; seemed considering, and then said, "Yes, he sent in for it. That's the

one you mean, I suppose? We were putting our heads together trying to unriddle a queer inscription inside the cover, and could make way nohow. Perhaps you're good at that sort o' fun, being a scribbler yerself."

Archie shook his head. "I doot no. Was Mr Weir long over it?"

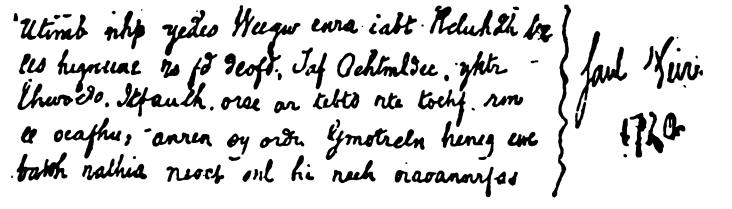
"A fairish time," answered the member of the firm, suspiciously.

"Oh, then, it's nae use my trying; for he is much cleverer nor me."

"Well, look a 'ere, my young friend. I don't often bet; but I'm danged if I don't have ye for a fiver—and if ye lose ye shan't pay. I am so confounded sartain yer can't make it out."

"Your terms are easy enough. I dinna care if I try; but put the siller doun." (A hectic glow on the cheeks with excitement and impatience.)

Wattle did as requested, and brought book and money from the same desk. Archie noted that. "There is something in this," he said to himself, opening the book with assumed indifference, and gazing at the inscription, which was as follows:—



He asked for a slate and pencil. He wished for these because calculation could be easily erased. He was soon in deep reflection. He had never reflected more deeply in his life. He evolved and revolved, and wrote a confusion of problems in cryptograph that wellnigh caused the tuft of wiry hair on the stout man's head to leap and descend after the precedent of the stage-wigs of burlesque. Like the *canaille* generally, the old rascal entertained respect for deep calcula-

tion; and when he saw this intelligent lodger in the throes of unravelment he congratulated himself upon so soon securing the man they required. And it really seemed he had resolved to do it, and not to go until he had done so. An hour passed, and the woman came in from next door with a message from Miss Daisy. The child was very anxious, and could not resist sending in to see if all was well with *him*. And Archie sent word back he would not be long, but was busy for a time. Wattle sat at his desk, waiting with panting suspense. Men were coming in and going out all the time of it, and there was great confusion. The burly Jebeson shuffled into the private room; and his savage eyes glowered over the morsel seated calmly upon the wooden chair, calculating away as assiduously as a boy at decimal fractions. The sun mounted higher and higher, and at last came full in his eyes, and Wattle, who sat opposite, saw them flash with a light that was not of the sun.

"Have you got it?" he asked, eagerly, seeing Archie carefully cleaning the slate.

"I think I hae; and it was weel worth the workin' oot."

"Something in the Treasure way, Mr Weir was thinking?"

"Ay, something in the Treasure way—the Large Treasure way; amaist o'er much to do good to onybody, I'm thinkin'." The extreme simplicity of the young man quite won the good opinion of this appreciative member of the firm.

"Well, I've lost th' wager, an' ye've won it at some cost o' time and pains."

"I think I have," said Archie, coolly, putting the money in his pocket, remarking, further, "there is no doot in your mind, I suppose, about my really having made oot the writing; because if so, I winna take the money."

"None whatever. And now, what does it say?" asked the other, with breathless avidity.

"Na, that's for Saul Weir alane, when we meet again; for the interest's his, and naebody else's." Then, before the stout man had time to recover from this unexpected discomfiture, David beat a retreat from the fastness of the Philistines, bearing the precious volume with him.

* * * * * *

The practical aim in the direction of help and solace which was under all the rhythm and sweetness of Archie's poetry found visible expression in the energy with which he accepted the mission conferred, as he believed, upon him. The night when that solemn call was heard, and he was chosen, as he imagined, to be the deliverer of the man to whom he felt bound by all the most sacred ties of gratitude that can animate a human heart—chosen to descend from his stars for labour in catacombs—chosen for the sublime office of saving a life,—that night turned the current of his thoughts into one strong channel. All the poetry went into that. The genius so long singing heroism and devotion put these into form solidly cut and clear as though in old Greek marble. He knew now all the deeper purpose and loftier meaning his life was capable of. Alas that he should have learnt its weakness also! Physically he was wholly unequal to the task before him, undertaken at a time when absolute rest, and for months, should have been accepted. But that fine sentiment of gratitude nerved him to great things, lending, for the time, a power that surprised himself; and sometimes he thought of the penalty those pay who drive nature to unreasonable tension.

Whatever suspicion had moved him when he visited the firm, it became a positive assurance upon deciphering the inscription of the book. He fathomed the plot instantly, and stood dazed before the tremendous crime. Not a minute must be lost. The victim would perhaps be without food, becoming more faint and exhausted with every hour. He knew little of Saul, only that he had been saved by him. The noble nature was but learnt by instinct. The fine face was seen but an instant, yet had flashed upon his soul for an eternity. It was a devotion created of an hour, imperishable before epochs—one of those splendid loves that shine hither and thither, redeeming the mortal of its paltriness. The severe idealism of his character came out in the act commenced, more strikingly than in his writings. A deed was to be performed, and instantly, or it might be too late; and he

set about it, taking Daisy into his confidence for many reasons. He was weak bodily, and unequal of himself to execute wholly and solely his purpose. The child might not lend hand-help; but her company would tend to support, and if he sank she might bring assistance. He also felt the burden of that secret of the inheritance greater than he cared to be saddled with alone, or deemed it safe to preserve entirely to himself. And he confided it to Daisy because she was Saul Weir's best friend, and was more to be trusted with it than any one Archie knew. His opinion of this child improved with every hour he passed in her company. He made her an exact copy of the inscription, with explanation, in case any unforeseen accident befell the old book; but he left all the rest, as to its use, simply to her discretion,—and then he believed it was safe as though in the Bank of England.

Thus these two began their work of rescue.

The method was this: judging by the sounds he had heard, proceeding from no hand but that of Saul Weir, he was convinced the place of his concealment was under ground. The direction from whence the sounds proceeded served, in some measure, for guidance; but there was more valuable indication, he thought, in the fact of a large quantity of coals having been there deposited upon that evening. It disturbed him at the time, as it will the sick, sensitively subject to racking noise; for he thought emptying of the sacks would never come to an end. *Now* it bore a terrible significance; and he believed that existed which really *did* exist—an excavation leading out from or under the cellar: and, weighing it well, the latter seemed, in every respect, the most probable. Hence, Archie resolved to make a similar trench, branch and break through into the other; and upon this expedition, he was certain depended their hope of reaching their friend alive. No great undertaking, perhaps, for a vigorous robust man; but to this delicate one, slenderly formed and frail of hand, it was a task of magnitude, and it makes his deed sublime. He braced himself to it, fancying Saul working in his direction, and how they would meet midway, and of that meeting—its affecting nature—when he would not allow Saul to overwhelm him

with passionate gratitude, but would give him the credit of the rescue, every bit of it. Such fancy nerved for the work; and the young man's eye was brighter than for a long time since leaving Scotland.

The shop was closed, and they deemed it prudent to work entirely alone, not knowing how far the talkative domestic was to be trusted. She was therefore dismissed until again sent for, preliminary to commencing operations. The woman was aware of Daisy's contemplated removal to Mlle. Bernardin's until Mr Weir's return, so that her dismissal created no wonderment. After her departure Archie went out and purchased the requisite implements. He took with him one of the flat packing-cases wherein Saul Weir had transported his books, and returned, after dark, with the tools in this. He had no doubt whatever that a sharp watch would be kept upon his movements by the firm next door. To outwit them in the matter would be to make mortal enemies of them; and it was not very likely that Saul Weir would deal with a tender hand when it came to a settlement.

Having locked up the house, they lit a couple of candles and proceeded to the coal-cellar, where Archie cleared a space near the wall, and—set to work to meet his friend.

Quick-beating hearts, quick-moving hands, hurried words to one another! Archie breathed a brief prayer that success might attend their labour, lifting his soul in supplication for strength until their solemn purpose was achieved.

It seemed slow work, the soil was hard and dry; but Archie kept at it, and in a couple of hours they saw a respectable hole. Every now and then he would pause to listen for some responsive echo; but none was heard, and much they feared that their friend was overcome by hunger and weariness, and had fallen at his toil. It made Archie increase his efforts; and when he stopped to rest a while, the little girl applied herself with energy. All children are gardeners, and love digging. This was digging with a vengeance, and for a prize. Her labour helped materially. They talked and became familiar friends over it; they encouraged one another, and liked each other better for this isolated serious performance. All the

goodness of heart, and endurance either possessed was called forth by their exertion, and was bared to the notice of the other. They were knit by a common purpose, that was but a parallel link to the strong tie of their poetic instincts. It is not too much to say Archie could not have achieved success alone. The cheering inspiriting effect of that bright and hopeful little face animated the best of the work. He found it as others have found it before him—the best light in a dull place. Both pictured the coming meeting, and sadly feared for the state they would discover Saul in—perhaps insensible, or bruised and bleeding, and faint with fatigue and fasting. They conjured up all sorts of gloomy fancies, and worked amain. But progress seemed slow. Novices and weaklings, it could not be otherwise. At eleven o'clock they desisted. It was an absolute necessity their strength should be husbanded, and restored by rest. Both recognized this, and bade each other an affectionate good night, Daisy going to her room at the top of the house, and Archie again throwing himself upon the sofa in the kitchen. It sorely troubled them to leave their friend in his suspense, even for those few hours; but it was unalterable.

The ancients polished their pearls by scattering them in the midst of doves, to be played with until smooth and white. The work engaging the attention of these two, served the same process with regard to their thoughts. And when toil was stayed a while, and there was leisure for solitary musing, and gliding into dreams, they thought of each other's words, strung beautifully.

Archie awoke soon after six and arose for the day's duty, calling his companion as promised, and setting to work while she prepared breakfast. He was one of those who cannot do much before breakfast. Daisy performed her part very charmingly; and the two sat down to their meal, quite an old-fashioned couple, and happy for the nonce.

They had got over the night and seemed that much nearer to Saul Weir.

They talked with absorbed interest of the time when they should reach him, and also of the pleasant surprise they had in

store concerning the Treasure. Then Daisy asked, "And how soon shall we get to him, do you think? because I want to have something very nice all hot and ready, and it must be something light just at first, as he has most likely been so long without."

Of course Archie could give no idea, and he felt uncomfortably apprehensive regarding his own strength; the work tried him more than he admitted, and he was of the calibre to work until sinking before a complaint rose to his lips. However, the best possible was done, breakfast hurried over, and the work resumed, with an activity that did credit to Mr Saul Weir's coffee, so long as the effect lasted. And real progress was made. When Daisy called to see how he was getting on, after washing up the breakfast things and making her bed, she was agreeably surprised to discover his progress; and as the time drew near for Saul's deliverance her excitement lent impatience, and she begged permission to take a hand at it. Archie assented, and rested, his eyes sparkling while she ran on explaining all they would do when Saul was found. Tongue and hands kept company nimbly, then after a little both grew slack, as a tired feeling crept over the willing spirit, and the older one resumed operations.

"If you don't mind I will run in and let Mlle. Bernardin know I am all right; and shall I ask her if she has heard any sound of digging, just to see if we are making too much noise?"

Yes—Archie thought this wise; and the little girl tripped up-stairs and in to her friend. While she was gone he endeavoured to accomplish a visible length onward, and apparently did so, for when Daisy returned to him she clapped her hands with delight, the progress seemed so satisfactory. It was certain this young man could not work like a navvy, but considering his strength he was producing no mean result. The mounds of earth thrown up were swelling by slow but sure degrees, and already assumed the proportions of fair hillocks, watched by the little girl, as they grew, with absorbed intentness. It was not much adapted to either of them

this earth-boring, but a great reward at its end would balance the distaste and pain. They worked on hope; and prospect of the coming rapture when their friend was found, and their great deed was *un fait accompli*, sweetened the sore drudgery. Deep draughts of sympathy, drank at each other's eyes; low trembling utterance, freighted with feeling for one another; a touching kinship in this resolute endeavour, sweetened also the tedium of the slow performance. Once Daisy ran up-stairs and came back with some olive-oil; she guessed Archie's hands were blistered; and so they were, sadly marked and painful, as she found when she made him desist and hold up his palms for her to see. On her knees, holding his fingers firm, she kissed the red and yellow wounds, to make them well, she said, and then rubbed them over with the oil, sending him back to his work considerably better, or fancying himself so; and then she went to the kitchen, opened a tin of soup and prepared him an unexpected lunch. Archie evidently knew what he was about when he took Saul Weir's pupil into his confidence. All this helped; brought the desired end within more possible and probable distance, and when noon arrived the workman was laying the lines of his junction. A sufficient depth was reached, and he began to excavate the wall of gravelly soil between them; he could not determine the thickness, had no means of calculating accuracy, but pushed on, firmly persuaded it would terminate near enough to the place of Saul Weir's incarceration to admit of breaking into it. All the afternoon he continued the work, but in spite of his indomitable will and terrible anxiety, his efforts relaxed; his joints were stiff, his back, between the shoulders, burned with pain, and the muscles of the arms were strained to their utmost tension. The full stop came, he was unable to proceed, and the tears were in his eyes to think of his weak defeat, and of that waiting, doubtless starving, one, who must have heard the sounds of approaching relief and would wonder why they were thus abruptly discontinued.

"Daisy, dear," he said, faintly, "will you come here and knock wi' a' your might to let him ken that a' is weel, and

that we'll begin again shortly?" She did so, and he was more contented. The signal might be understood.

Worn, and utterly exhausted, Archie allowed himself to be coaxed up-stairs, where Daisy compelled him to lie down and rest, while she set about getting tea; and after this had revived him somewhat she pulled off his boots, and sought to soothe him to sleep by smoothing his hair and passing her cool hand across his brow. So soon as he slept, the child crept off down-stairs to the scene of their work. Very dark and cold when by herself, and she lighted another candle to make it brighter, then pinned up her frock, tucked up her sleeves, and began to work, while Archie slept; to ease his labour on awaking, to advance if but a few inches. Strength was given to those small arms: the most fine and slight of instruments are used in many successful operations.

She made progress valiantly, and glowed with the thought of the first joyous kiss; if she could only reach him while Archie slept, what a happy awaking for him! She did not look up often, so many shadows filled the dusky place, and she felt so much alone, almost afraid of the noise she made. If she could only have heard some answering sound, some sign of Saul's near presence, it would have cheered her mightily; but all was still, save for the dull echo of her own exertions and the rumbling above of vehicles in the road.

The work caused her limbs to ache, and her arms could hardly obey the earnest will; pain encircled her wrists, iron-like and cruel; a red glow flushed her face, and her brow throbbed with heat from stooping; she had to pause, and looked disconsolately at the dull earth wherein she seemed making such poor progress. Then she remembered that good Mrs Potter had told her it was by littles all great deeds were performed; and she thought that very likely if she kept on *her* great deed would be accomplished. It quite brought a smile to that steadfast cast, making her young face aged-looking: and the smile shed the light of purpose cheerfully undertaken and hopefully pursued. There was no faltering although there was great fatigue. The loneliness was of itself sufficient

to discourage, and there was fear of those men did they hear her work; even when most active she paused, timidly fancying she heard them close to her. All the resolution natural to childhood was necessary to overcome those nervous fancies; it caused her to work with desperate vigour and drown her fears in the force of impatience. Deeper consolation there was—one of the qualities rendering this child's character so valuable—a happy ever-present sense of One watchful above all dark burrowings and all human cruelty, a watch beneath which even a fragile little mortal like herself was safe, a watch that was impelled by a care capable of both protecting and helping her. Under these quiet consoling convictions, this fairy engineer worked on, knee-deep in mould and gravel, stained by moist clay, looking very unlike the clean and tidy girl so charming in the eyes of every one. She had seen her friend marked in this way by labour very often, and knew full well that the traces of toil disappear beneath soap and water.

Every now and then Daisy wished Archie would awake and join her; but so sure as she caught herself wishing it, she checked the thought as selfish, and worked the harder to please and surprise him. The wind penetrating through the cellar caused her candles to flicker and gutter, the shifting flame seemed at every gust about to be blown out, while the dancing shadows in the hollow where she worked had all the appearance of a revelry of goblins. Never had child a more terrifying task, or one undertaken amidst more dismal surroundings. Fear is more exhausting than labour to young or old. In this case it joined with the exertion in taxing her strength to its utmost. The uncertainty regarding the fate of Saul Weir added to the sense of dread oppressing her. The mystical and equivocal always create awe in such youthful minds, unless prodigiously of the world. This child experienced a distinct feeling of awe, and it made every stroke onward a tremulous step nearer the dark inscrutable revelation. She hardly dared to hope her efforts would be crowned with success, it seemed so impossible; yet in the depth of her

heart there was the yearning ambition to be the medium of Saul's deliverance.

She thought to herself curiously as to whether she would dare go on. Supposing the partition was broken through by her, and no Saul came forward to meet her — what then? The place beyond this dividing-wall, shadowy and secret, might be very terrible, might be shrouded in darkness, a darkness crowded with horrible objects; and it seemed to her, while working so perseveringly onward, that she would need greater courage after her task was done than through the whole course of it. Thus there was no certainty of a blissful ending after it all, and her heart was the heavier in consequence.

She paused but seldom at her work; the sudden stillness when she did do so, broken but by the strange sound of falling earth or some stone displaced from its long embedment, was more oppressive than her regular motion with the tools. Water began to ooze and trickle at the depth she was digging, and the narrow rugged passage was wet and cold; the candle-light glittered on its sides; creatures, that turned her pale, wriggled from disturbed seclusion to take inspection of the daring intruder upon their compact domain. Once she came upon some pottery — quaint jars, grotesque cups, grinning weirdly in facial clay — broad grins buried by old Britons whose girlhood was less gentle if not less brave: and she turned up some bones, causing her to shudder and leave them far behind, for she knew not their meaning and tried to forget that they were there. She was becoming wearily conscious of enfeebled strength, of endurance tried to its utmost, and she experienced keen dread of failing at her purpose; but this was not to be the end of her gallant endeavour.

For an hour or more she kept diligently on with the task, then the spade sounded with a different stroke, the partition appeared to yield to her, the low archway wherein she was working trembled, her spade clove the thin residue, gravel fell in a cloud and covered her, but she shook herself from the mass, and, stunned and bruised, stood up between the two

excavations, murmuring wistfully, "Saul, dear Saul, tell me you are alive and well!" There was no reply. She waited in dire agony one instant, and then retraced her way for the light, it was so dark in there. She hurried with it to the place and stood amidst the confusion, looking hungrily round in every direction; but she could see no Saul, and the child burst into a passionate flood of tears. The purpose accomplished at last, and then so grievous a disappointment! No wonder her tears fell thick, while great excitement seized upon her; for what had become of Saul Weir?

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"WHOM THE GODS LOVE DIE YOUNG."

DAISY took a more careful look around. It was evident that Saul had not been idle. Holding up her light, she discovered a large hole near the roof of this cave, where Saul had, apparently, been endeavouring to work his way and reach his own house through the floor of his own coal-cellar, under the partition-wall dividing the two houses. Upon the ground was collected the debris he had made in doing this—portions of the foundation-wall, mortar, and great stones; and there, also, lay his hatchet, blunt and dirty, where it had fallen from his hand. Very cautiously she picked her way, timorous and trembling, making a painfully minute inspection of the piled-up lumber, not daring to flee from the place, so certainly did she feel that her services were needed. Some of the old articles had a ghastly look, causing her to start in affright, with a terrible dread every minute of coming upon a cold white face; then she heard a noise, slight, yet it thrilled her, it was so like the outstretching of a limb. She turned and looked in the direction from whence it came—just to the left of the aperture by which she had entered. There, where the heap of earth, the debris from above, had fallen, she saw the body of her friend, half buried by a lot of loose earth that must have fallen with him or upon him when his strength had failed. His face was so deathly, so changed by despair, or hunger, or the impure air, that she burst into a passionate flood of tears, while she wound her arms round his neck and lifted the poor head to a more gentle pillow. The current of wind coming in with that breaking down of the earth had par-

tially revived him, and he now opened his eyes upon, perhaps, the deliverance he would most have chosen.

"You will soon be better, dear," she murmured soothingly; "do not be frightened, you are all right now."

"I am trying to recollect," he moaned faintly, closing his eyes and knitting his brows with pain.

"Don't try, only rest, you will come round directly." She had no restorative appliances, poor child, and so used nature's remedy. With her breath she blew upon his brow, it was refreshingly cool to him, and the purer air let into the place assisted her. Again he opened his eyes, and the struggling consciousness lent less vacancy. He groped feebly with his hand as though searching for hers; she took hold of his, there was faint answering pressure. She was right, he *was* coming round by degrees; she waited hopefully, nor would she leave him even to procure aid in bringing it about.

He seemed exhausted and worn; every movement was performed with difficulty, and he gasped, with dry, sobbing, stifled throes. She was not frightened now, these symptoms even did not alarm her; she felt no surprise, indeed it had seemed hardly possible to find him living; but there was hope still, and hope means so much in childhood.

She had been but just in time; a little longer and the suffocating atmosphere, with the privation undergone, would have performed the work calculated upon by the tribe above.

He was becoming sensible. Anon her heart was gladdened by the flicker of a smile; then she heard her name faltered, and it had never seemed so sweet. "I am by you; there, do not worry about anything, only rest." She was careful with the carefulness of woman's years at this critical time for him; with more than the carefulness of woman's years, for they, many of them, would have blundered the sense and reason into him in impatient effort to see him right or righted. She knew this time to be a progression of slowly asserting stages; knew it not of old medical lore, not of nursing experience, but of uncheated, unspoilt instinct; and this is superior to all the drummed lessons of pharmacy.

Recovery here was a very slow process indeed, and the

slender arms soon ached supporting her burden; but after a while he began to breathe more freely, began to look inquiringly around, and make a movement as though willing to sit up; she rightly judged the will to be everything.

With Daisy's assistance he was enabled to sit up, and then perception began to dawn.

"Yes," he said, with calmness, "I recollect."

Then he gently raised a hand to stroke her hair. "You have saved my life, child."

"No," she said quickly, "not I;" and explained, slowly, so that he should understand fully, "it was Mr Campbell; I only found you here."

"Campbell?" he repeated, he could not remember connection with the name.

"The gentleman you rescued at King's Cross," running her fingers through his hair with a gentle soothing movement.

"I remember him; is he better?"

"I doubt not; but he heard you call to him for help."

"Yes, I did do so, when I thought to attempt a way through if he could have met me."

"He set out to meet you, and only left the work when he had nearly done so and was dropping beside it. I persuaded him to go to bed, and came here to complete his work. I shall now have two dear patients, and I shall be so happy in seeing each get well."

The cheering words brought a little smile to his colourless lips.

Daisy could understand the severe shock to the system this incarceration had caused, but she also understood how that, where another would have succumbed, the fine constitution of Saul had been but temporarily vanquished.

"Do you think you could walk a little way, into our own house?"

"I think so." He made the attempt, feeling uncertain at first and stumbling over the lumber lying about; but his quick companion was there to support at every false step, and cleared the way by sheer force of the strong little arms.

With considerable difficulty he clambered out of the hole

Archie had dug in the adjoining cellar, and when they reached the kitchen Daisy settled her charge upon the sofa, warming him a cupful of the soup that remained from lunch. So soon as she thought she could leave him, she put on her hat and ran to recall the domestic, who was lodging at no great distance off; and she stole a minute to look in at Mlle. Bernardin's to acquaint that sympathetic person with the happy news. Then she went indoors, and found the carpenter progressing very favourably. The servant came in within half an hour, by which time Mr Weir was still better. It was getting late, shops were closed, and their good neighbour came to the door to know if she could be of any use. She would not come in, and upon finding the servant there, retired, asking that she might be sent for if required.

Finding Saul to be getting on so nicely, Daisy left him to return to her fellow-worker, who might now be awake, and to whom there was such great news to tell. But upon drawing near to the bedside, she started, so singular a change had come over Archie Campbell; not weariness so much as an expression of resignation, which lighted up his countenance with an altogether different beauty. Unconsciously the child felt awe-stricken and afraid, but he bade her so gently to come to him, she drew near, trembling.

"You have overworked," she said—"have injured yourself."

"Na," he answered sadly, "it was a' done afore that—lang afore. It merely put the headstane upon it." The child's face became pale, her hand shook in his.

"What *do* you mean?"

"I winna be with you lang, dear; my feelings tell me all my trouble and illness will soon be over."

"Pray do not talk like that; I have good news for you that will make you feel better. Your work saved Mr Weir; he is now upon the sofa down-stairs, and will come to you!"

"Ay, that is good news," he said, with plaintive calmness; there was no shadow of excitement at hearing it.

The flickering of the firelight disturbed him, and he turned upon the bed. "Come this side, Daisy dear—so; let me lean on you, while you read a little from the Testament." She

complied with exquisite gentleness, and in a low tone read to him from the Epistles. He had always loved St Paul for his marvellous tenderness and feeling.

Daisy could not help her voice being tremulous: she had gone through a great deal of late, and this was no slight ordeal for the sensitive child. She did not try to realize that what he had said, would happen, it seemed too terribly sad. She did not know his history, or she would have realized it all too quickly. No isolated history, unfortunately.

He derived much joy from that gentle support she gave him, and from those tender utterances so full of promise and comfort. Then a strange regret came to him.

"I should have liked to have loved you in heaven, Daisy, there to have met you again;" and as he spoke his voice lost its Scotch accent, which almost always disappeared when his feelings were a prey to deep emotion or moved by solemnity.

"Let us hope you will," she said, the tears she could no longer restrain falling fast.

"No; you are so young, and will no doubt grow to honoured womanhood; how am I likely ever again to meet the child I shall say 'good-bye' to?"

She could not answer that which has saddened wiser heads from the beginning.

He was silent, thinking; she had not the heart to interrupt that solemn reverie; he was thinking of Rupert, who had been kinder to him than a brother.

"I will leave you a legacy, little one, which obey in memory of me. Had I lived we should have been firm friends, you and me. Will you give the friendship you would have given me to one who has shown me kindness; who is as poor, as much alone, as little understood as I am, and who will be the same good friend to you that I would have been?"

She did not immediately answer, and looked sorrowful that she could not reply directly. He fathomed the scruple.

"You feel to be wholly Saul Weir's, I will not dispute with that; the distinction is here,—you will give Saul your love, which ranks first—give Rupert your friendship, which comes next."

It was clear, doubtless, according to unselfish and unworldly looking at it; anyway she had not the heart to waver, and gave her promise, and was rewarded by the pleased smile he bestowed upon her while telling her more. Then, "I should like to see Weir now; I must explain to him the record in that old book."

She went and told Saul the truth about their friend, rather apprehensive of its effect in his present weak state. And Saul was indeed shocked and greatly affected, but at once proceeded to the chamber above, where a pathetic greeting took place. Then, with emotion, Saul said—

"I can scarcely in the fulness of my heart speak to you of myself and of what you have done for me; let us talk only of yourself; allow the woman to go at once for medical advice; you are clearly overdone."

"Oblige me by not doing so; this would only embarrass and could be of no earthly use: there is an inner monition which is incontestable, and to war with that, equally as to ignore it, is to produce disquiet. I wish to be very restful now, with nothing to disturb me."

They complied, believing he knew best, and certainly not wishing to despoil that calm peace which impressed both by its submission and patience.

"I must talk with my last remnant of strength of an important matter bearing upon your future prosperity. Give me the book, Daisy."

Surprise now moved Saul Weir exceedingly, when the little girl handed that relic of his ancestors to Archie.

"I will not explain how I came to decipher this; Daisy will tell you of all that has occurred. It was written, presumably, by a member of your family, whose wealth would appear to have troubled him. He here sets down memoranda of its burial in the gardens of his house,—the Herongate, Suffolk, under the Cedar tree."

Saul started. He the heir to some buried wealth? It was strange! The intelligence did not disturb him, but the communication was so sudden and unexpected, it could hardly be thought of as yet. Hearing a noise without, Daisy went to

the door; it was the servant to know if she should prepare either gruel or arrowroot.

When composure was again restored Archie continued: "You will learn from Daisy that this was the motive of the attempt upon your life. Others appear to be aware of this Treasure, which, of course, as the descendant of its owner, you alone have the right to claim."

"Supposing I thought it worth the trouble, Campbell," said Saul Weir, quietly. "I am grateful beyond measure to you; but let us talk of the far more grateful subject of yourself." Then he cried with great depth of pain, "Oh, if I had but your life given to me I would ask for no other treasure!"

It was so spontaneous and sincere it moved the dying man to the soul. He sank back and was motionless for some time, then softly murmured, "Listen—kirk bells! How sweet they sound to-night! Would I could see the stars I watched when the kirk bells rang at even!"

Again there was a pause, an interval of awful quiet.

"Saul, Saul!"

"I am here, dear friend."

"Yes; do not leave me. I wish my soul might first wing its way Scotland-wards, before parted for ever."

"Do not think of it. Be comforted."

"There's a bit of tartan in yonder box, Saul, give it me."

It was a mere scrap, of inches, cross-bars of colour with a language. Saul gently handed it to him, he clasped it with a hand upon his heart. Saul whispered, "I will seek out your parents; they shall be mine; their remaining years shall be made happy."

"Not happy——"

"I should have said comfortable." With bowed head the friend pressed the thin hand that had done such brave service at the last.

"At my lodgings, Saul, are such poor things as I have been calling mine; and manuscripts of poetry."

"It shall be published in the most chaste form a memorial volume can take."

"I do thank you so for that. May I beg something?"

"Nay, command; if all the earth has to be moved for the carrying out of your wishes!"

"I wish it *Inscribed to Etta Lute;* those four words will do."

"I will sacredly obey your instructions."

"I have no further wish other than to die without pain: I have had so much pain of late. And do not think it was effecting your release caused this; no, the final disappointment broke my heart, Saul. I shall be rather glad to go, I have been so weary. And to you, most delicate dear one (addressing the child, giving her his poor wasted hand), I offer this commission—to keep the mound in order where they lay me; no flowers please, save those of your name, and a sprig or two of heather. You will let her do this?" to Saul.

He could not reply, great sobs were racking him, and his emotion shook the bed; he inclined his head simply, and the dying poet understood.

The beautiful face was endowed with new beauty. The rare face a mother would no more gaze upon with pride, never again stoop to kiss with maternal rapture, was changing to the more solemn aspect.

Without speaking he, by a slow movement of the hand, indicated that Daisy should be taken from the room. The supreme thoughtfulness at such a moment thrilled Saul Weir to the soul; noiselessly he took the weeping child by the hand and led her from the room. Then he knelt by his dying friend, supporting him with one arm and placing the other round him in an affectionate embracing manner that brought tears to his eyes. They would soon be closed, would soon reopen upon tearless glory.

A convulsive start; "Dear mother," he gasped; a happy light flitting an instant; then—Archie Campbell lay at rest.

He died without pain.

The poet-soul for which earth had no welcome was removed gently from its thorny way.

Saul Weir knelt long at that bedside, then arose, and dashing the manly tears aside, drew himself up. There was much to do

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE ENGLISH SCHOOL—OF ART AND IMPUDENCE.

PROBABLY no English town is in the neighbourhood of more interesting or more picturesque drives than Leamington in Warwickshire, from whence convenient access may be had to Stratford-upon-Avon and to Kenilworth, two sites of historic and romantic attraction to the world at large; and without the latter of which it is doubtful if Leamington would ever have become the flourishing town it has; since the publication of the novel by Sir Walter Scott drew the entire public attention to the locality of the castle: multitudes flocked thitherwards; it became the fashionable pilgrimage, and the village in the valley of the Leam rapidly arose in popularity. As usual, the faculty had no little hand in the beginning of things. Dr Kerr was present at the birth, Dr Lamb fostered the youngling, and Dr Jephson adopted it, and behaved handsomely by it, and much his name is honoured to this day, as a name is when substantial benefit is derived from it.

There are other places of note round about, and it is always policy to settle in the vicinity of such scenes; it affords theme for letter-writing when there is a dearth of news; it is valuable when friends are staying with one; yields converse, and is somewhere to drive to; the coolest may rhapsodize over charming Compton Verney and Guy's Cliff, the most unenthusiastic feel warmed to admiration by Kenilworth.

The memorable site of the battle of Edgehill possesses national interest, and its pilgrims probably outnumber those of surrounding localities; one may often hear some old cavalry officer narrate how an ancestor there figured or was dis-

figured. Presumably some people visit Edgehill without meeting with somebody who had an ancestor on that historic field, but it is the rule so to do; and by all accounts a very large body of men—of grade and command—were there present! We have not exhausted the topographical features: the old town of Warwick well repays a visit, while the antiquary will discover relics of most ancient usage at Coventry. Are we lovers of architectural grandeur? Warwick Castle satisfies the most chaste rules of that order; and there are Stoneleigh and Coombe Abbeys, remindful of Schlegel's fine simile, who calls them "frozen music." Lastly, who will not visit Charlcote and Hampton Lucy, the complement of poetic excursion?

The Leam is a lazy dream-laden river, which cultivates the luxury of idleness, and invites to the pleasant *dolce far niente* upon its banks. After leisurely dividing the old from the new town, as though the treasurer of its traditions, this gracefully slow old stream jogs on to join its rival, the Avon, purling, with silver current, a mile away, and always, to our mind, with a haughtiness of unapproached association. From this point extend walks of rare beauty at all seasons of the year; but in the autumn they are perfectly enchanting. The most favoured of these winds away upland, where, upon an eminence, may be seen Hillsland College, a fine educational establishment of modern design, presided over by Dr Virgil, an esteemed member of the Royal College of Preceptors. Much of the success which had favoured the school was owing, if the prospectus is reliable, to its beautiful situation—commanding extensive prospects, and enjoying a spaciousness and airiness altogether unequalled.

Standing by the iron gates admitting to the garden, if we look west our interest is caught by a Norman pile some little distance off, backed by purple woods, and flanking an extensive park, where, even from the distance, we discern the tawny and brown herds of deer. This is Nugent Priory, the seat of the Dowager Lady Nugent. Lord Lawrence Nugent, her ladyship's second son, resides with her at the Priory. His lordship has devoted a life to the finest art-tastes—has added

to the canvas-treasures of the Priory some of the famous paintings of the world. A man cannot collect at his hotel in town, or at his club or chambers—not, that is, with any nicety and satisfaction. This nobleman, however, possessed the advantage of being upon the most pleasant terms with his dowager lady mother, who, absorbed in politics and a sort of card-table intrigue with the nations—which amused her between the knitting and did harm to none—permitted this son of elevated tastes, of which she was well proud, to follow his hobby as he would; entertain artists and *cognoscenti*, convert the Priory into a studio of Schools and treasury of Masters, and make it one of the great English seats of art honoured in this and other lands. For such a purpose the Priory was well situated. Its every window presented a landscape which, if lacking the southern skies depicted upon the walls, were yet more pleasing in their home-like English beauty. The private and choicest retreat of its master looked eastward, caught the early sun, and keen fresh air, and a distant view of the College, at which, for some reason or other, his lordship often looked with an expression that might very pardonably have been taken for one of fondness. Of this more anon.

Lady Nugent, an aged noblewoman of astonishing vigour and activity, seemed to grow younger with her years, and to have left age itself far behind. She was beautifully opinionated; but since her son never, by any chance, differed with her, this strong characteristic caused no unpleasantness. If her ladyship had no one at hand to talk decisively to she would address herself dictatorially to her knitting-pins, which, flashing resentfully or passing it over quietly, according to the sun, led to no very serious debate. It was a crotchet of the old lady's that herself and other old ladies of state, away in old country places of ancientry, really did a great deal towards the government of kingdoms. She perused the representative journals diligently, and, without presuming to have the gift of prophecy, could always tell what was about to happen. She owned to an intimacy with statesmen of the past generation, and was of opinion those of the present were not worth being intimate with,—in spite of which she was

familiar with the secret of their innermost motives, and was as well acquainted with diplomacy of the Cabinets as though an omnipresent spirit in their midst. Over the mantelpiece in her bedchamber, a fine old painting of the Duchess of Marlborough represented Lady Nugent's idea of the greatest among womankind; and that chamber might have been the duchess's own, so cumbrous was it with an almost royal state. True, the splendour had seen its best. The panoply was discoloured, and the general effect oppressively, dingily grand. Still it suited the clinging love for the past, which so marked her ladyship's taste; and nothing would have induced her to sleep in any other apartment, any more than she could have induced one of her guests to sleep in that. Her ladyship was as outspoken, also, as the duchess referred to; and, offend or please, spoke her mind tremendously. To those who did not know the Dowager Lady Nugent this seemed so very like rudeness, that a first visit was frequently the last. Her ladyship was no respecter of rank, nor creed, nor opinion, that was not akin with her in Conservative politics. Her Conservatism, however, was of the past, like all the belongings to which she was so attached. Modern Conservatism she rather unkindly described as a species of confection, sugared and hollow, without any flavour or substance about it, and containing ingredients very likely to disagree with one.

What is this peculiar and resolute lady like in appearance? Observe her upon the broad stairs, leaning upon a massive gold-collared ebony stick, yet rendering that attitude of her age gradual as a majestic inclination. She is essentially a gentlewoman who will never bend, as she has never stooped. Thus erect, by will if not by power, she stands before us a figure that no time will ever erase from our memory. White and exceedingly luxuriant hair, worn as the grand dames of old wore their hair when it was grander ornament than all the gewgaws and trappings that convert our women's heads into parodies of the savages'; a proud clear-cut face, pale, save where the faintest of colours mantles upon the cheeks, and wrinkled deeply—by the cares of diplomacy; very bright eyes, of a deep grey colour, taking a darker expression upon them

when she reads through a partner at whist or a designing and corrupt political opponent; a firm pretty mouth, albeit that the lips are dry and thin—a mouth that would never lie, even in the interests of diplomacy, nor court questionable influence, even for party advantage. The hand clasping the stick is exquisite; and when it is resting upon the rare old brocaded black satin of her gown it looks as though modelled in the purest wax, by some great and skilled moulder of the delicate and lifelike texture. There is no modern fashion to be seen in that gown of hers: it is simply the retiring robe of ladies of the Court long ago. No reproduction would have served. It would always possess a tone of falseness. Her ladyship had many of her ancestress's robes in the state bedchamber; and she preferred to wear these antique styles to assuming fashions which seemed to her destitute alike of sense, grace, and beauty. Her ladyship adhered to her convictions as obstinately over this argument as any, and quite outraged the superb taste of her son, who consoled himself by either dressing his beautiful creations as he pleased, or else leaving them to luxuriate at will without any dress at all.

In considering the angles and facets of any sharply defined character, much light may be found reflected by the quaint utterances and those unusual traits the world calls singularities, which have riveted the person in the recollection of contemporaries by eccentricity and peculiarity of word and deed. There is a splendid gleam here into character, in these noble inmates of the Priory. Glance now for an instant at the son of this lady. We learn at once that the man places advancement of art before advantage of self; and this is a bright possession to begin with. Imparting his idealism, and extending those principles upon which it is founded, is literally a greater joy than the hugging of selfishness; and we say there is something different about this man to other men. And learning further of his words, as they are shelved and lockered and desked here and there about the world, we come upon a being as truly unlike to others as can well be, in bold independence, in audacious and daring iconoclasm, in vigorous and masterly conception; and we are not surprised, upon

studying the scroll of his life, to find one of those sensitive souls by their own gifts apart, of their own ideals aloof. The experience is a progression, as all soul-experience is. We stand before it, and before the work in the gallery; and the one is the outcome of the other—it all is a sensitive tension, with an attempted grasp of an ideality never realised. And it is an aggressive property of his own genius, which rebels against the narrowing. Thus there is unrest. It is no reposeful soul, with all its loftiness. It knows not the calm of self-satisfied peace. A breath, so sensitive it is, will agitate and disturb, especially where its instincts of the natural are concerned. It is a nature singularly fair and honest of purpose, indicating much that is new, revealing many precious side-gleams, and directing to traits of the most exalted character. Its prejudices are important, as prejudices often are—significant in this instance, because of kinship with that strong decision which has influenced this man through life. The incisive, unfearing judgment, the calm, nay, majestic, criticism of one a father in his art, and among the chief of those enlightened authorities who wield both pen and brush, has naturally been regarded with respect; and although we find brusque utterances, we cannot, because of this, lay aside invaluable thought, and that which all art students and all students of literature esteem for its honesty. A true and simple soul, all lovely and all wise, the sacred shrine of whose inner life is approached by so many but understood by so few. His work and words are scrolled with honour alike upon archives of the conquerors and the conquered. And the secret of his life is locked in his own breast—an innocent flower-like secret, that one would scarcely credit this strong man of art with possessing. We should say he was old enough to know better—should have outlived all such weakness, and, with the idealities of his studio, ought not to need the pastime of ordinary folk, and the rest. Lady Nugent also would have taken it on to her ivory and ebony chess-board table, and have worked it out in a very diplomatic manner; but Lord Lawrence was one of the few wise men who keep their dreams untold, unbreathed on by the coldly critical and prejudiced.

One fine November day, Lord Lawrence saw a commonplace conveyance, drawn by an indifferent animal, toiling up the ascent.

"Another for the College," thought his lordship, but he found he was mistaken; it passed, and wound onwards in the direction of the Priory. It turned in at the park gates, advanced at a quicker pace along the carriage-drive, and drew up at the house.

Visitors were numerous, but they came in respectable chariots, as befitted the approach to so ancient a pile.

Shortly afterwards his confidential servant brought him a greasy card upon a salver, which he held at a precautionary distance from him.

"What is it, Stevens?"

"I don't know, my lord; leastways I do know; an offensive person, name *Mr Isaacs* on the card, requests the honour of an audience. He states that he is a picture-dealer in a large way."

"What does it mean, I wonder? I am not partial to picture-dealers; but,—however, show him into the small room."

Lord Lawrence proceeded to the chamber mentioned, where he was nonplussed to discover a thin shrivelled-looking individual standing on the piano, holding a painting he had taken down from the wall, the back of which he was leaning over and examining with intent interest.

Lord Lawrence haughtily awaited until the singular being replaced the picture and alighted upon the carpet. Like the patron of art the visitor was advanced in years, sufficiently so his lordship thought to have known better manners.

"I beg your lordship's pardon for being a little too forward upon the pleasure of a first acquaintance with your matchless collection; really my enthusiasm is so great when in the presence of the Masters, I am carried away by my feelings and that impassioned ardour which is in the background of all emotion of the palette."

His lordship bowed distantly. This person was not half to his taste, in spite of his artistic glow.

"My servant informs me you are a picture-dealer. Is it in the position of a person wishing to dispose of works of art, or as a person desiring to inspect my gallery, that you present yourself here? In either case I particularly require a note of introduction."

"I have it, my lord; your pardon for my remissness. My excitement when in presence of the Masters habitually makes me forgetful. Permit me to hand you a recommendatory line from my Lord Gascoyne, who is well and honourably known to your lordship."

While saying this he was struggling with his old brown velvet coat, which buttoned fast by two button-holes, the threads of which were entangled round the buttons. He could not get at the breast-pocket, and in his efforts to do so cut such eccentric antics the nobleman walked further away, uncomfortably apprehensive the person would go off somewhere. After a while he released himself from his dilemma and brought forth an old greasy pocket-book, from which he produced a letter, small, daintily folded, and even after its ungenial receptacle, fragrant of the desk in which its paper had been stored. Then his lordship read—

> DEAR NUGENT,—*Mr Isaacs, the bearer, is a capital fellow at hunting a missing masterpiece: he has a thorough knowledge of the Schools. I bought some fine things, through him, for my place near Beechester.*
>
> GASCOYNE.

"Yes; this is satisfactory. And now, sir, the immediate purpose of your visit. We shall then know better what we are about."

"Your pardon, my lord, for not having explained it before. Very gracious of you to ask, to which I may reply, truthfully, to solicit permission to inspect your lordship's collection, and next the honour of any instructions you may favour me with. Modestly speaking, I venture to say I can acquaint you with the ownership of every noted picture in Europe; and, in a strictly business and confidential sense, I shall be pleased to

procure you, or endeavour to do so, any genuine and known work you may favour me with commands for. Copies I don't touch. My regard for the Masters is illimitable, but their imitators I abhor!"

This was uttered with a severely emphatic manner, as though to express the speaker's repugnance to any approach to the fraudulent. There are some of these conscientious people about, happily.

Still the look of the person was not ingratiating; it was not of the artistic order; it presented rather the appearance of one of those minor studies that assist in the tableau of the modern auction.

"I agree with your objection to the copyists. I am sorry to say I have been deceived once or twice myself."

"It is not for me to presume to know so much as your lordship concerning art, although a slender acquaintance with the Lombardian, Neapolitan, Venetian, Bolognese, Florentine, and Roman Schools, does enable one to pass an opinion. I think, with extreme modesty be it said, there is no production of those Schools unknown to me."

"Then your knowledge of painting exceeds my own, sir, by a very long way; therefore, allow me to relieve you of any further plea of modesty."

Whether the irony was finer than the dealer's perception, or because it suited him better not to perceive it, is uncertain, but he immediately exclaimed, "Your lordship is very good thus to enable me to speak with freedom; my emotion is such in relation to the Masters that it is with the greatest difficulty I can use the becoming restraint courteously and respectfully due in your presence; and when I tell you that no elementary intimacy with the Flemish, Dutch, German, and French and English Schools marks my devotion to the glorious study of art, you will understand my appreciation of the liberty of speech, and my deeply profound consciousness of the honour of conversing with yourself without formality."

The nobleman acknowledged this sonorous address very distantly; the person's liberty of speech was too pronounced to be gratifying.

"I need not detain you, sir; the examples you quote are sufficiently represented."

"Cannot your lordship find room for a charming little Dolci? I know where to put my hand on as fine a Buonarotti as any extant. Cimabues are scarce, my lord, in private collections." Said cunningly, his keen eyes literally shooting about with a rapidity that turned the calm gentleman giddy.

"I thank you. I don't care for the painter; his chief qualities always strike me as age and ungainliness."

The lover of Masters looked wounded, and said in a subdued tone, "Your lordship may not admire the School?"

"Very little. The only Florentine I cared to purchase you have not mentioned. I have a mediocre Leonardi da Vinci in the Italian gallery."

The dealer skipped enthusiastically. "My patience! how I should like to see it! But I cannot, dare not, agree with your lordship in considering it mediocre."

"I have no objection to allow you to form some other opinion. Come this way, sir."

Like most true disciples Lord Lawrence was a little proud of his collection, and experienced pleasure in permitting it to be viewed by any one betraying sympathy with art; and although the curious visitor carried it to excess, it was just possible he did ardently enter into the subject.

His lordship led the way to a gallery of medium length where the six chief divisions of Italian art were rather illustrated by choiceness of selection than by number. Apparently the visitor was surprised at the limited space accorded the Italian; he ventured to observe, "Your adoration of the Italian Masters is not extended to the orthodox extreme, my lord."

"Just so. But you, who know where every example in creation is stationed, will understand we can't all have them. I leave the grotesque sacred effigies of Italy, and the vegetable vulgarities of Flanders and Holland, to those who admire them. Nevertheless, I possess a small selection, not to be quite without, and to avoid the reproach of a too decided prejudice."

"And the works are selected with great and genuine taste,

my lord." He was skipping from one to another with intense activity, applying critical inspection through a huge black-rimmed glass fished from the recesses of a pocket in the lining of his shabby coat. Lord Lawrence leisurely watched him darting from one to another, and was not surprised to hear him put in a word on behalf of his beloved Masters. "The Schools you denounce, my lord, originated art, and produced magnificent specimens four hundred years before the English or French had anything to show;——"

"While Albert Durer conveyed the old market-women of Nuremberg to Jerusalem, and insulted the Hebrews by palming off expressionless Germans as portraits of a race famed for its beauty." Possibly Mr Isaacs had never heard a patron speak with such iconoclasm; he looked up with a quick, almost alarmed scrutiny, as though it struck him there was more in this prejudiced, vigorous-speaking nobleman than he had been led to believe, or had himself suspected. Certainly if his object had been to create an impression of warm partiality for the Foreign Schools and complete indifference to the English, he could not have succeeded better. Laying a hand upon the faded gold frame of a Giorgione with marked reverence, he somewhat hotly observed, "The traditions of art canonize its great founders; their work is sacred, of itself, irrespective of treatment."

The remark and its evident honesty pleased Lord Lawrence; he bowed more courteously. Any blunt sincerity obtained recognition at his hands, rhodomontade he especially disliked. He did not know his visitor was but changing his cards, upon discovering him of a slightly different calibre to what he expected.

"I approve your candour, sir, so far as to admit that every honour should be shown to the illustrious ancestry of art. My family, as you may be aware, is highly Conservative: I sanction the principle in its application to art, yet my own taste recoils from the monstrous invention of the early workmen. Neither do I concede the Schools of the Monk, as I term them, distinguished any more for their sanctity than for their refinement. Mr Roscoe wisely advises, 'Take for your

guide Greek art; there all is beauty, dignity, and repose;' and I agree with him. Failing the Greek I prefer falling back upon the English, not from extreme nationality, but through a liking for simplicity without affectation, and power without pretence. The most honest voice upon art that ever spoke, that of slaughtered Haydon, said in reference to Michael Angelo, whom I presume yourself and others of your craft take for the Titan: 'Michael Angelo was a great genius; but let the student of Europe be assured that his style has been grossly overrated; let them banish his works from their eyes, and substitute Theseus and Ilyssus, and the real grand natural style of Phidias will soon exclude the satanic Etruscan, and violent anatomical distortions of Michael Angelo. He often overstepped the modesty of truth, and gave a swaggerish air to his figures. Every figure of his, looks as if he was insulted and preparing to return a blow. If they sleep, they seem as if they would kick; if they move when they are awake, they seem as if all their muscles were cracking.' I agree with Haydon usually in his criticism, and especially in relation to the Continental early work."

"If your lordship holds with that apostate dauber, I can understand you entertain no blind reverence for these magnificents of the past!" He was spreading out his hands right and left as though embracing the magnificents,—dirty hands, oil-stained, yellowed, with blunt fingers, and bitten or broken nails: the cuffs of his coat were frayed, there were no linen ones underneath, but red wrists, coarse and cracked: and altogether this Isaacs seemed a queer being to be fostering the Masters. He was conspicuously shocked by the Haydon excerpt pulling down his Titan. The tone of his voice when replying was distinctly tremulous; he looked aggrieved, and that embracive expanding of the hands denoted the extent of his sorrow. He would gather unto him Raphael d'Urbino and Giulio Romano, Correggio, Annibal Caracci, and Guido; Piombo, Titian, and Canaletto; Domenichino and Guercino, —and would protect them and theirs from such profane vandalism. The owner of the Nugent collection was not impressed by the championship, perhaps did not consider it

complimentary, and with some impatience proceeded to the Dutch and Flemish gallery, where his companion was immediately lost in admiration. And justly, the range was exceedingly fine, it was the pride of Nugent Priory before ever this artist-lord commenced adding to its wealth; and to tell truth he had added but very little to this section of his treasures. Ancestors had procured these, when old paintings were about in Europe, and the mania for their possession had scarcely set in; Van Eyck, Quentin Matsys, Breughel, Vandyck, Snyders, Hobbima, and the junior Teniers of the Flemish;—and Potter, Cuyp, Vander Velde, Rembrandt, Gerard Douw, Ruysdael, Ostade, Wouvermans, Huysum, and Berghem of the Dutch Schools, were represented by notable masterpieces, and Mr Isaacs passed from one to another with an enjoyment he did not attempt to disguise. With these were a few Germans: Durer, Holbein, Lely, and Kneller. Standing before the latter, the man with frayed cuffs gave this as his opinion, "After all, for sheer force of character few of them surpass our own Hogarth!"

It was said as though with a burst of candour, and as though making concession in coming round to the English.

"A great satirist; that scarcely, I think, constitutes the pre-eminent master. The man's forte was caricature. I don't like caricature,—our age is too prodigal with it. I have a few little-known efforts of Hogarth's—they are in the English collection, and may be unknown to you also; a spirited satire on a meeting of the South Sea Directors is especially good." His lordship was leading the way to the collection and did not see a curious change distorting the dealer's countenance; veins were swollen on the forehead, the face was red, the eyes glittered with a fox-like satisfaction, his two even rows of teeth, white as though accustomed to practice on the bones of victims, met close as by anticipation. At last! He had come purposely for this, and now could scarcely restrain the feelings tearing at him inwardly. This South Sea picture he had sought for high and low, and had learnt that it was in the possession of the Nugent family, purchased by an ancestor of the original owner who was one of the characters satirised. By

the time they had reached the picture Mr Isaacs had recovered his composure and looked at it long and thoughtfully through his glass.

"Well, sir, what do you think of that?" asked Lord Lawrence.

"The execution is pointed, my lord, the outline of features well and faithfully preserved I have no doubt, under the mask of grotesque extravagance; but it needs a key!" And he stooped, staring through his glass at the lower portion of the painting as though searching for some clue to the names of the people represented.

"Oh, I can tell you who they are!" remarked his lordship. "The man in the chair is Sir John Blunt, to the right of whom is Mr Aislabie, the Chancellor of the Exchequer; next to him is Sir John Fellowes, the sub-governor; that stout man to the left is the Earl of Sunderland, a peer of the Upper House; next to him is Mr Stanhope, son of the Earl of Chesterfield; and opposite, the Duke of Portland. The men at the bottom are Mr Secretary Craggs, Mr Hungerford, Mr Edward Gibbon, Mr Pulteney, Mr Knight, and the fine-looking old man with clasped hands resting on the massive stick, Mr Saul Weir, who afterwards became a notorious miser; and it is rather curious it was of this same old gentleman my great-grandfather bought the picture, or at all events at the sale of his effects—and I am rather under the impression it was painted for him."

"Dear me, how very curious and interesting!" looking at it with renewed interest, and greatly surprised.

"Yes; Hogarth as you know made capital out of the South Sea affair. Every one was not quite so fortunate."

"One or two chatting up in the corner you have not mentioned, my lord;" and with deference, yet looking exceedingly interested by the travesty, Mr Isaacs indicated the group.

"Sir Theodore Janssen, Sir Robert Chaplin, Mr Sawbridge, and Mr Eyles, members of Parliament and Directors of the South Sea Company."

"And the gentlemen leaning by the mantel, talking, while glancing at the board?"

"Sir John Lambert and Sir George Caswall. We were naturally anxious to know who these personages were, and after advertising I came into possession of a print copied from it, giving the several names below each portrait."

"I cannot say how fully I appreciate the honour you do me, my lord, while thus explaining; it is undoubtedly a work of great interest and historically valuable. And speaking of that print, there would probably be something of the kind at the back of this,—you will permit me to reach it down and look at the back?"

"Do not trouble, I have already done so." The picture-dealer bit his lip.

"I should be sorry to alarm you," he said suddenly and with gravity, looking intently at the picture, "but I verily fear the moth is at it!"

"I never before heard of the indefatigable insect attacking pictures," said his lordship, coolly.

"Now I look closer I do believe it's the maggot," said with still graver intentness.

"Inconvenient for the directors," observed his lordship with dry pleasantry, and not in the least concerned. He knew as much about pictures as the other, and was aware of it. Mr Isaacs was piqued.

"Shall I examine it, my lord? Thousand pities for an heir-loom of the kind to be spoilt. Your pardon for my solicitude; when in the presence of the Masters my emotion runs away with me." He tried to smile, it was a sickly effort. The nobleman walked away, remarking, "Glance your eye at the remainder of my pictures, sir, and excuse me if I hurry you, I have already exceeded the time I intended being absent from my studio; when one is talking the time slips away so." Had he turned he would have seen a scowl of disappointment upon the other's face: he was foiled. He had, however, seen the memorable painting, and he said to himself, "The clue to the mysterious hiding-place of the Treasure is or was at the back of that picture, if I could only possess myself of that cryptic talisman!" He slowly moved away.

Fox and the grapes.

And what is more, another individual engaged in the thirsty quest.

Had the great Englishmen no attraction? He passed Dobson and Thornhill and Mortimer without the courtesy of a look, while at Wilson and Gainsborough he darted a surly sort of leer. Not a glance for Reynolds or Romney, Barry or Opie; hurrying by Copley, West, and Fuseli, bestowing a cross-eyed glance upon Wilkie, and shunning Northcote and Stothard, finally coming face to face with Haydon, at whom he made a fiendish grimace. That was the man who outraged the Masters: he entertained great respect for the Masters, Hogarth especially.

"And there is nothing I may have the honour of doing for your lordship?"

"Nothing, sir. My galleries, as you see, are well appointed; and I have no money to spare just now for further purchases."

"If he only knew," thought the dealer, while driving away from the Priory, "that millions, literally millions, are hanging behind one of his daubs. Some men I could pity for not knowing it, but one can't sympathise with a fellow whose soul is dead to the Masters. And here's to my next meeting with Painter Hogarth," taking a pinch of snuff from an old brown box that might, for its greasiness, have belonged to all the old Masters in turn.

CHAPTER XL.

THE MASTERPIECE DESIGNED BY THE GREAT PETER PAUL.

THE study of great men is a sign of the times.

The public know much of great men, rather more than the great men know of the public.

More especially do matters connected with their private and social relationship obtain a ready hearing.

If there is a spice of something uncertain somewhere, just the suspicion of a hitch in the admirable working, it is more warmly received and is very promptly acted upon. Of all great industries the foremost application belongs to the Manufacturers of Scandaldom.

One of the great men of whom but little was known, however, named Peter Paul Potter, seemed enveloped in impenetrable privacy.

He belonged to that distinguished club, the SHERIDAN: he attended St James's, Piccadilly: he was present at dramatic first nights: he was a fellow of this, a shareholder in that, and a chairman at the other: but still it all conveyed no indication of his more intimate intercourse, the friendly contact upon which kind inquirers like to be very well informed—or they get anxious.

It was indisputable that he owned an ambitious dwelling-place, from which his carriage bore him to his studio at another part of the town. Popularly speaking he was well off and independent; painting, not to exhibit, but to please certain munificent patrons, who paid him at the extravagant rate such munificent patrons are accustomed to pay such exclusively great men. His paintings, we say, sold at a large

figure; and the man, when the fit took him, could coin gold.

But he had worked for it. He was well in years, and looked back on a career of struggle. It perhaps helped to make him unfeeling, for he was the most unfeeling of his sex, which is saying no little. We know one sample of it in his treatment of wife and children, and it was not the only charge to be made against him.

Mercenary also; with all his wealth he did no good with a fraction of it.

Yet the pathos upon the canvas, the great episodes there wrought out, led speculation into high atmosphere, and there was a tradition of this painter's disinterestedness. But at last his genius had surpassed itself; the town flocked to see the latest conception; he kept this himself, would not sell it, though fabulous sums were offered him: he rented a place called a gallery, had it removed there, fixed curtains and other effects, with a cunning light, and charged a shilling a-head. He knew what he was about.

Now comes a curious point, which some of those kind inquirers aforenamed would have loved to seize upon. He had a peephole contrived in a partition through which he could watch the faces of those looking at his picture. The man in charge, paid by the week, thought his employer was either thus posted to test his honesty, or else to make sketches, he could not quite tell which; but thinking it as much the former as the latter, it kept him ever on the fidget, and kept him honest. He was wrong in both surmises, although the painter, to mislead him, used his boards and pencils at the table whereby he sat while on duty.

The motive was a far deeper one. First glance at the picture: consummate art had there depicted the ghastly death-scene of a miser; the walls were bare, the boards without a carpet, the table sparely spread with common fare; upon a comfortless pallet an old man lay gasping his last—with a nerveless skinny hand trying vainly to reach and clutch an iron box which could just be seen below the pallet. The terrible realism, the awfully weird presentment of the death-

throes was complete; no such distorted features, pallid with fear and anguish, were ever transferred to canvas. It had been truly said the painter reached the climax of his art and very summit of his power in this conception. None knew the subject, and he did not enlighten any; there was a key to the period in the dressing of the figure, which seemed to be of the time of George the First; further than this no explanation was vouchsafed. It was of no consequence, THE DEATH OF THE MISER, as the painting was called, drew large crowds; with which, of course, the painter's reputation had something to do.

So confirmed was the success of this exhibition in London that the proprietor received flattering overtures for a tour of the provinces. For the present, however, whatever he might do later, he declined all such arrangements, and THE DEATH OF THE MISER remained the correct thing to go and see in town, according to public opinion, and the always interesting and instructive public press.

Now this unique exhibition opened at 10 o'clock A.M., and before proceeding thither for his usual daily attendance, the proprietor was one morning leisurely chipping an egg over an 8.30 breakfast, with his eyes on the critique of the Autumn Gallery of Old Masters recently opened. While so doing, and before the chipping process was definitely accomplished, the Brompton omnibus set down a passenger, who ran quickly up to the imposing-looking front-door of this imposing-looking villa, and with a ring that meant business if it meant anything, made his arrival known. The great Peter Paul guessed who it was, and removed the top of his egg with a jerky ill-at-ease movement, and plunged a strip of his bread-and-butter into the soft golden depth,—how like it was to sending a grappling-hook amongst the ingots! With the second dive the visitor entered the room, and removed his hat in presence of a Master. It was the gentleman with frayed cuffs, whose emotion was so pronounced, and whose liking for Hogarth was a national weakness. Having disposed of an inclination, a mark of respect to his superior, whom he regarded with becoming awe, he drew up a chair and sat down.

"When did you get back?" asked the superior, his lined creased face wearing a singnlarly aged look, while the hands, invariably restless, seemed gifted with involuntary scrambling.

"Last evening. I should have waited upon you, but I knew you were due at the Lyceum, and that it would be sure to be a late night."

"What success?" He eyed the other minutely, with as searching and watchful an expression as when at his exhibition he studied the faces of the public, and waited for a discovery that would come, he was certain, if he had but the patience to wait for it.

"Our information was correct—the picture *is* in the Nugent collection; whether the important information is at the back of it, I had no means of determining. The owner is a queer one to do with, and possessed of an obstinate opinion that makes one's blood boil; as for the Masters, he scorns them right and left." Mr Isaacs sat bolt upright while saying this, and opened his yellow blunt-nailed fingers, looking upon his palm with an outraged expression: recollection of the sacrilege again stirred his devotion to the Masters.

"Well, you don't expect to find every man as big a fool as yourself? Especially where he's got money!" This back-handed blow was more wounding than it was meant to be. The beginning and the end of Mastership, in the modest judgment of this great man, took form in the genius of Peter Paul Potter; and any other creature, past, present, or to come, might be allowed place, but could not be admitted a greater master of the art. His factotum knew something of his arrogance, but the blast of his east wind, scouring over time and rending the canvases of the immortal, hurt Mr Isaacs's feelings severely.

"We won't carry that question into our argument, sir. I don't possess the wealth of yourself or my Lord Lawrence; and if with the wealth I imbibe the prejudices, I'd rather be without it. I *have* done a tidy bit of business in my time, and may do again. I should have been better off than I am just now if I hadn't come in your way (excuse my speaking plain), becoming the tool for your Saul Weir operations, although far enough off the recompense seems to be; and if I'm to be with-

out reward until the Treasure is secured, it's little enough, it strikes me, I shall see of it yet awhile!"

"You were always a discontented grumbling sort of party, Abraham Isaacs, in your palmiest days, and now you're down in the world you've not improved; and, like human nature generally, turn round on your best friend when in low moods. I repeat what I have before stated—the Treasure is in existence, and only wants finding, when I will, as we have agreed, hand you a portion. I am privately assured the old man was troubled in his mind before ever he gave himself up to the miserable mania possessing him in his latter days; and under the influence of uneasiness, disturbed conscience, or whatever it was made the burden of his secret greater than he could bear, he was seized with a singular fancy for leaving in hieroglyphics a clue to the hiding-place of the great Treasure; one of these —for I am far from certain the irrational old fellow wouldn't leave others in various queer places—was cunningly pasted upon the back of a favourite picture, this very Hogarth we have been searching for so long, and must secure at all hazards. For the other clues, if such exist (and since, as I believe, his mind was touched, it is very probable), why, we need not trouble ourselves about them; it is doubtful if anybody else knows of them, or would believe in them if they did; and if they do, it's a clear race of skill, in which the cleverest wins. No such prize was ever held out before; for all I know there never was such a breathless chase. That I don't care about; the only one thing I dread is—lest the old man has any descendant who can lawfully put in a claim, and rob us of it directly we've got it, and it would be worse to lose it then than never to find it. That, Abraham, is my only apprehension, and I've set a nice little trap to resolve any doubts. If such an interloper exists, he's bound some day or other to come and see my picture; I'm as sure of it as that I sit here. I have studied the soul as closely as the human face, and the subject will draw him; *then* I shall detect our man instantly, and will follow him to his place of abode—at which juncture I shall beg leave to drop the curtain over 'THE DEATH OF THE MISER.' You won't be interested beyond that point. Having taken your share,

you need not ask any questions, and you'll have no stories told you." After a pause he continued—

"Now about the Nugent picture! It will arouse suspicion if you go down there again. I think I may count upon enlisting the services of a poor devil at my Club, one Rupert Redland, who is, I know, awfully hard up, but quite the gentleman, and if properly instructed, just the fellow to oblige us. It will require excessive care in putting the question to him, for he's a sensitive sort of person, and unless treated with uncommon tact, is very likely to resent the delicate little commission. You shall take a note on to the SHERIDAN, and he will probably step round one evening this week."

With the greater part of this elaborately outlined scheme Mr Isaacs was already familiar, and he had no need to ask questions, even at this stage, lest he had any stories told him. But there was one point he ventured to make inquiry upon, its meaning being without a frame. Abraham was a stickler for frames. It was mention of his "share," his "portion;" that might mean sevenpence in the million, or some equally unsatisfactory allotment, and he would just like to know what it did mean. The great author of the Peter Paul masterpiece heard him with the lenient smile of a prince, and was good enough to explain. "When the Treasure comes into my possession, providing no risk from this possible descendant, you shall receive—as the price of your secrecy and silence—the yearly payment of six hundred pounds. I reserve the right to pay this annually instead of in the bulk, owing to your passion for the Masters, which might lead you into expenditure and loss, when it is possible you would look to me for another division, which I should on no account consent to; and the ill-will this might produce between us is extremely to be deprecated."

The other looked down upon his digits with a curious expression; there were no nails to bite and he bit his lip, then slowly said, "Very well, Mr Potter, I accept your terms, which please give me in writing."

"That you shall have," answered the painter, who had narrowly noted the symptoms described, while saying to himself, "He is contemplating deceiving me."

And this he did have. Mr Potter wrote it and a note to Rupert Redland, which Isaacs took away with him to the SHERIDAN Club, where the person to whom it was addressed received it that same day, greatly to his surprise. It seemed destined to be quite an eventful week for correspondence. Rupert had the day before received a kind letter from Theodore; it caused his heart to beat, for it contained more than a passing allusion to his sister: and by that morning's post arrived a letter from Oliver Redland informing him of partial success in the search he had gone away upon, of a necessary incidental delay attending his experiments; and urgently requesting he would forward a remittance as soon as possible, to be addressed to "Mr Landred; left till called for," at the village post-office, near by where he was staying. And Rupert thought this a singular proceeding altogether. When, therefore, he received also that same day quite a friendly invitation to dine with one of the chief autocrats of their Club, it really did seem as though note-paper and envelopes were having a game with the young philosopher. The reserved and thoughtful manner natural to him, increased to that tone of the scale called the moody. Although not proud, he did not care to be patronised, and there was something about Peter Paul Potter that *was* patronising, and which he did not like in the least. The note partook of the spirit, and he read it without any particular pleasure. It ran:—

> MY DEAR MR REDLAND,— *The slight acquaintance we have formed at the Club has extended an esteem I felt for you from the first. The civil formality of Society only permits of a casual courtesy here and there. Will you dine with me one evening this week, suiting your convenience, when I hope a sociable hour or two may improve our knowledge of one another?*
>
> *Very truly yours,*
>
> PETER PAUL POTTER.

Rupert pondered over this epistle, and, although unable to find fault with the wording, considered it unaccountable; for he was

ignorant of having inspired the writer with esteem, indeed would have thought him the last person in the world capable of being so inspired by any person. The strange life, from his youth upward, in the company of the weird-dealing uncle, prepared him for all sorts of unusual occurrences and mysterious events, and he had a way of glancing over his shoulder and looking up from the ground, as though at any moment he might be startled, or find himself face to face with something unpleasant. Going from the Club, thinking of the letter, this feeling was strong upon him,—a gloomy curiosity to learn the meaning,—an impatient restive suspense, one of the primest agents of destruction in the Devil's arsenal.

He resolved to go that evening, and did so, as the man of hospitable tendencies anticipated. Mr Potter received the visitor with cordiality, not over-strained, but sufficiently unlike him to provoke wonder.

"Do pray sit down—so glad you've come; we never can have a word together at the Club, so many fellows about; buzzing noise; impossible to feel at home there, so I don't attempt it. You are very good to pay an old fellow like me a visit, although I know you are accustomed to age. Your revered uncle is well, I hope? Ah, I am glad to hear it; and from town; dear me, you surprise me!" Thus pleasantly running on, while standing with brusque dignity, passing his ringed hand every now and then through his rough untidy white hair, this painter's manner presented rather a type of genuineness, and created a more favourable impression than he had ever done at the Club. It was an instance of his quick discernment when he guessed the thought crossing the young man's mind. "I think I read your surprise that I am found more agreeable in my house than out of it; you will never know a man at his Club. It takes the effect upon me of the aggressive, and often makes me feel irritable; some things in this world put me out dreadfully, literally seem to make my every member fractious and susceptible to the choleric; the mean shifts one hears of, and detestable actions that are played upon one, are enough to make a saint irascible and peevish. Only this morning, I was taken in finely; a scurvy trick

as was ever known has come to my knowledge, and, by Zeuxis, I would pay anybody a hundred guineas who would set me right, although it is nothing more than to discover an old hieroglyphic. Astonishing how some things try one! *En revanche*, I am going to eat a good dinner, so allow me to usher you to the next room, and bid you welcome to a very quiet yet sociable repast."

He led the way to the dining-room, with no abatement of his pleasant manner. Rupert, delicate, sensitive to kindness, loving home-comforts as much as any one could, felt grateful for the attention bestowed, and thought more kindly of this man who had always appeared so supercilious and overbearing. The recent talk, on the principle of preparing the way, caused no particular notice; he believed Mr Potter was merely chatting to put him at ease, or until dinner was ready.

The walls of the room were hung with deep red velvet-paper, and embellished with a great mirror and three paintings in massive frames. One of these was the portrait of the great man himself, painted by himself; another, the portrait of his wife, not great, but painted by himself; the third, his eldest daughter, also painted by himself. He had not removed these, the melancholy Miss Potter and the amiable Mrs Potter, having been painted by himself. He liked their pictures better than their company, and certainly did not know any examples of art of equally fine workmanship that he could put up, supposing he took those down. But thoughtful Rupert's eyes were upon that woman of sad countenance and resigned sweetness; he knew no more than the public of the painter's family relations, but he did read a life's suffering, a life's wrong, in the gentle face of the woman whose place should have been at that board. He sat right opposite, and often lifted his eyes to hers, until he quite came to know them, and to feel drawn in sympathy. She seemed so like a woman who would make home happy, and by the calm ministry of her unobtrusive domestic service shed peace and sunshine, whatever the station.

That looking up at his wife's portrait might have been one of those irritating things to which the painter had called attention, for he observed his visitor with anything but a

pleased expression, and the eccentric fidgeting hands went here and there all over the table-cloth.

"A relative of yours?" asked Mr Redland, interested, and wanting, at the moment, something to say.

"No, sir; my wife!" It was said in the sharp tone which snubs and cuts off further inquiry. To Rupert, who lived with but one aspiration, the being enabled to do good, and improve the happiness and condition of his fellow-creatures when in his power, this curt dismissal of his ventured interest did not improve his liking for the lady's husband. Full of feeling, it wounded him as much as though she had been an old friend spoken against. Unstrung by the merest approach to harshness, the reply, in which hatred blended with icy indifference, wounded him to the heart for her sake. Just at this period Rupert was under the spell of his first captivity to Love, rendered the more unsettling owing to the necessity—by his fine code of honour and unselfish friendship—of extinguishing the flame while low and within bounds. It kept him even more tenderly susceptible than usual, and did not improve his naturally weak state of health.

Towards the end of the repast the host recovered his powers of conversation. Good honest sentiments, and genial remarks, fell like crumbs from the rich man's table; and when the fare was removed and wine and walnuts were supplied, he felt it was an appropriate time to introduce that for which the "poor devil" was being entertained.

He sat at the head of the table, like some brusque yet fine old English gentleman whose large heart overflows with genial hospitality, and on his right sat the slight pale student, reared in so different an atmosphere, fostered of cold chemistry, nurtured by unfeeling science.

"I was going to relate an abominable little anecdote about that hieroglyphic, just to show you the double-dealing of some people, and to prove to you what a precious avaricious world it is."

"It needs little proof, Mr Potter," replied the young man, with a faint smile; but as his eyes had wandered again to that gentle lady's face, it created an unfavourable impression on

the host, who had received a portion with that lady, the basis of his present affluence. Yet no meaning was intended; Rupert's eyes were drawn all unconsciously, with the attending thought of the happiness that might have been his, had she stood in the relation to him of mother. It was a face recalling vividly James Montgomery's lines on prayer:—

"Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear;
The upward glancing of an eye,
When none but God is near."

Mr Potter's restless, untractable hands trifled with the crackers and the walnut he was about to operate upon. He laid the latter down with caution, placed the nut-crackers beside it with care, took a sip of wine, and setting his elbows on the table, and his chin on the cushions of his two thumbs, looked straight ahead to the passing traffic of Brompton Road; he then commenced his little anecdote.

"You must know that when I first felt the divine gift of painting stirring me in early life, it took the form of animal studies. I loved the brute beasts which perish, and limned their graceful outlines, and in permanent pigments endeavoured to confer immortality upon the non-immortal. I visited the Hague; the mighty BULL fired my ardour. I hired a studio, and set to work. I conceived a grand subject; Europa, daughter of Agenor, king of Phœnicia, gathering flowers; a meadow-tract of gold lent-lilies, amidst which browsed the herds of Agenor, with Jupiter at their head in the assumed form of the Bull. I admit I adopted the head of the great copy; I own to a sublime design: but I suddenly found myself checked; no colour on my palette, nor procurable, that would do justice to the superb glow of my gold and white sea of vernant lilies, in which the sportive Jupiter and companions left a trampled trail of broken stalks and flowers. I rushed to Amsterdam, but met with no success. I must have gone over pretty nearly every one of its three hundred bridges in the hope of finding a decent colour-shop. Shops there were, 'tis true, but they sold paint for painting their ships, not

pictures; and I was returning disgusted, voting the Netherlands a sham so far as art or its preparation was concerned, when I fell into conversation with an old gentleman who, like yourself and revered uncle, was all in the way of philosophy and science. His intimacy with the Universities of Utrecht, Leyden, and Gröningen, was extensive—so he pretended, for he turned out a thorough old hypocrite; indeed, the artifice and simulation that man was capable of pass credence. He took me in, quite, when he began upon art, with which he was well informed, and what he didn't know he made up for by pretence. He got out of me the business I was upon, and expressed interest, with some animation, believing he could help me. He owned an old-fashioned place of business; although he had retired from active work, he was still head partner. He thought he remembered an old painting, amongst other articles, by the celebrated Englishman Hogarth; and, if he was not mistaken, there were secret directions on the mixing of colour for certain subtle shadings,—the tint I was in need of might be amongst them. I see this catches your attention, as it caught mine. I was absorbed, sir, and went with him to his place of business, a heterogeneous mart for the sale and exchange of articles of art and virtu. True enough the old painting was still there, the directions at the back in cipher. Now ensues the duplicity of the Hollander, whose conscience was as intersected by craftiness as his country is by canals. I hadn't enough cash with me to purchase the picture outright, and I assure you he put a long figure upon it, neither would he part with the directions without the canvas, because, as he said, if in the handwriting of the painter they were sure to enhance its value; so I deposited a guarantee that I would send the remainder of the sum asked for by him, when I was to receive the picture. He behaved in that dastardly manner which makes it almost impossible for one to go on believing in the race after it; sold it, sir, to somebody else, some nobleman-artist travelling to do honest students out of what few stray genuine canvases are about. The old impostor I never found; his representatives, of course, would not understand English when I demanded back my de-

posit. Imagine my feelings to-day upon learning that the very picture is in England, in the possession of Lord Lawrence Nugent, who resides near Leamington. I'm too old to undertake the business myself, but I'd pay any man a hundred guineas who would bring me the picture, or the piece of paper, if that was impracticable; for my great masterpiece is still unfinished, Mr Redland! When completed it will form an admirable companion to THE DEATH OF THE MISER."

Mr Potter took another sip of wine and cracked the walnut. His companion had listened without interruption, looking at the stolid shaggy narrator with no suspicion of deception, without any strongly marked interest, and all undazzled by the golden bait. We know how poor he was, yet how little value he set upon wealth for its own sake. If poor, the life was a lofty one, and certainly the last to lend itself to surreptitious righting of a wrong done so far away as in Holland. The great creator of a new order of lent-lilies looked piqued and mortified for a moment at the poor result of his efforts; but even that sour expression Rupert innocently enough regarded as caused by a tighter walnut than ordinary; he was free from any supposition of the truth. Dr Johnson says of Milton that he "was not a man who could become mean by a mean employment." So, had Rupert undertaken the commission of removing the paper, he would have gone about it in such a manner as even to rob that deed of its dishonour. But he took the view from Lord Lawrence's side: if the old man sold him the picture, no fault rested with his lordship, who therefore ought not to suffer injury because injury had been done to another. He replied, according to his thought—

"If consciences were bought and sold, I have no doubt a hundred guineas would be a liberal and tempting price; but if honesty is lax abroad, I think it the more reason for preserving it untarnished at home. The paper can be obtained in but one honourable manner, by writing to or seeing the present holder of the picture, and representing the matter to him, when he would with the affable courtesy natural to the English aristocracy, either allow you to remove or copy it."

"A good thought, my young friend, and many thanks; of course, of course! Now that did not occur to me!" Thus swallowing his chagrin the painter chatted on, and by introducing other themes erased memory of the one he started with, and which if not remembered in his own interests, he would rather was not remembered at all.

Peter Paul Potter was not one to waste hospitality upon anybody unlikely to be of use to him, so he cut the visit short by saying, "Well, you'll be wanting to get back to your books, and I promised to look in and see our friend Delancy in his new part. Talented fellow that—very! He seems to have the whole histrionic *répertoire* at his command. I like to assist in applauding legitimate business; it deserves countenance amongst so much artificial acting, and plagiarisms from Continental sources. Good night, my dear Mr Redland, so glad to have seen you. Good night, good night!"

The stiff and great domestic held the broad highly-polished door open for the visitor, who, with a word of civil thanks, very contemptuously received, glided forth, the door being closed upon him with the quick suddenness displayed by the great servants of the great when summoned to usher out the humble and needy-looking.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE SHARK STREET ADVERTISEMENT SUCCEEDS.

UPON a highly-burnished plate might be read—

HILLSLAND COLLEGE.

PRECEPTOR, DR VIRGIL.

Term was just expiring, and two of the principal boys were leaving—Arthur Penryllon and George Herrick. The school consisted of one hundred and twenty boys of all sorts: many very good boys, a few very good-looking boys; and at the head of the good-looking ones stood Arthur Penryllon, dubbed by his fellows "Beauty Penryllon," for his gentle demeanour and girl-like loveliness.

Aged fifteen, Arthur was about to leave school for the clerk's desk in a surveyor's office, and he did not view the prospect pleasurably, for he was a thoughtful and refined boy, given to reading and painting, designing and inventing. He would have selected some more congenial employment, but, unfortunately, was not permitted to exercise choice, being under the control of a somewhat unsympathetic guardian, who possessed but slight affinity with youth: he had amassed a large fortune in an office, and saw no reason why this boy should not do the same. And it thus came about that Arthur was destined to be articled to the firm of BOGGIS AND BLIM.

He was a clear-complexioned boy, with a face of bewildering beauty, and brow Milton might have paralleled in youth; large

eyes, more filled with poetry and the splendid dreaminess we associate with genius than with the cunning of Euclid and mathematics. Over the brow clustered wavy luxuriant hair which he had a habit of pushing back with much grace, thus exposing the handsome and intellectual temples.

Had the inclinations of this young gentleman been sounded it would have better decided his future. Gifted with talents, the promise of genius paramount above all promises, the brilliant qualities must lie dormant in that state of life to which it pleased his guardian to call him. Arthur knew this as well as any person, but his disposition was one of dutiful obedience, and he lacked the vigorous spirit necessary for making a resolute protest. He would infinitely have preferred employment of some constructive kind, that would develop his taste for ingenious creation, and into which would go a splendid wealth of artistic skill: the invention of the designer was his, combined with the rare nicety of the dexterous artificer.

He had learnt well and wisely of the head-master, who was not one of those to generally confuse with enlightenment, and darken the youthful understanding by overflooding it with verbiage. Among the portraits of dominies who occupy a gallery to themselves, we see this Preceptor Virgil stand forth with a sharpness of outline and well-favoured *physique* altogether uncommon. When this boy was sent to him, very young, tender, and sensitive—too young and tender and sensitive to have been sent to a large educational establishment—he recognised these qualities, and exerted his influence, which of course was supreme, in making school hardships lighter and school discomforts more homelike, and he was heartily assisted by his young daughter Ethel. Between them they certainly improved things in the domestic way, although making it worse for the boy in the school, where tutors and scholars vied in tormenting him. Victor Hugo, who loves to place his laurels upon the brow of a child, never conceived of one more full of winning ways and picturesque grace than this unfriended little fellow, for whom, because there was none other to befriend, God commanded love and protection should arise in the heart of a stern and harassed

schoolmaster. To the world Dr Virgil was the model instructor, kindly inflexible, firm, stern, and just, yet benign with encouragement and care: to his scholars the Doctor presented a more hard surface, but it was only because not one in ten understood him; it was imperative to preserve control, maintain discipline, and rule with decision—yet under all this an intensely affectionate heart beat with finer feelings than he cared to unveil to any person.

Next to the Doctor the most important person residing at the College was his daughter Ethel; an amiable, graceful, and clever girl, at this time between sixteen and seventeen years of age; and in spite of the peculiarity of her position in such a home, girl-like and innocent. The boys of Hillsland thought in choice moments of the Doctor's pretty daughter, and counted as golden the occasions of seeing her, which being few were of the greater value: but Arthur Penryllon was the only one privileged with intimate acquaintance. Penryllon suffered for it, and would have done so more had it not been for his friend and champion, George Herrick, a boy of different stamp, hardy, brave, and courageous, loving this slighter one as such natures do love the weak and delicate whom it is their fancy chivalrously to protect. Herrick was gifted with all that tact and shrewdness lacking in the other; keen, sharp, full of energy and aggressive activity; merry, mischievous, and caring for nothing; able to fight his own battles and those of his friend, as he had done since when at a very early date he challenged bullies of the school to cease tormenting "Beauty," or answer to him for it.

Now, as often happens in this sphere of contradictory events, Herrick, whose taste ran upon an adventurous life, seeing the world and possessing unbounded liberty, was intended instead for the busy routine of the warehouse. And the boys often put their heads together over the contrariety that existed. The stronger seemed disposed to rebel, counselled opposing the wishes of their friends, remonstrated very stubbornly against the injustice of sacrificing their happiness, and was altogether very awkward to argue with; but Penryllon stuck to his creed, that the wishes of those above them should

be obeyed, even at the cost of distasteful or disagreeable occupation.

Upon a certain day in November Dr Virgil handed Arthur a letter. "From your guardian, Penryllon; you can go to my study when replying." With a kind look, unseen by the others, and a ponderous gravity that disguised his own dread of its contents, the Doctor passed on. He shunned thinking of the brink which every day drew him nearer to, when his exquisite pupil would be removed from his care, and his vocation would be darkened by the loss.

Master Penryllon read the epistle with a slightly agitated bearing, and his friend Herrick watched with rare sympathy; Penryllon handed him the note, and the friend read it also:—

DEAR ARTHUR PENRYLLON,—

I have written Dr Virgil of my intention to transfer you from Hillsland to London, where, in the old-established and highly-respected firm of Boggis and Blim, Surveyors, Shark Street, E.C., you will acquire that knowledge of their profession which is to be the mainstay of your life. I sincerely trust you are familiar with Book-keeping in all its branches, and with the basis of Land Surveying, as also with differential and integral calculus, equational arithmetic, plane and spherical trigonometry, mensuration, statics and dynamics, pneumatics, physics, and all that is likely to be of use to you while studying under Messrs Boggis and Blim. I am sorry that the distance prevents my calling upon those gentlemen, but you will present my best respects. I have by correspondence arranged everything with them, and I am convinced by their letters how exceptionally fortunate you are in getting into such a business-like office, and with such honourable people. I have written them by this post, and underlined your arrival for Monday next, therefore proceed direct.—

YOUR AFFECTIONATE GUARDIAN.

"Let us go to the Doctor's study," said Herrick to his friend, who was looking very downcast.

They proceeded to that quiet retreat, and Arthur, sitting at the table, could see out upon the lawn where a pretty girl stood watering the flower-beds, and his face became more grave; he would regret leaving Ethel more than anything else; then, fearing the thought did his friend injustice, he took George's hand fast, saying over it—

"It makes me unhappy having to go sooner than we expected; I should have liked to stay on."

"Well, I can't say I have any wish to stay on, but I have a most decided objection to commencing business just yet. Now if that letter came to me, you know, I would reply sharp, and let your guardian have a taste of your spirit. Take my advice and don't go to London to be bound to these people; you'll wish you hadn't—and, remember my words, you'll run away before you've been there a month."

"But what am I to do?" asked Arthur, helplessly and distressed.

"Now Beauty, dear, you know as well as I do what we've talked of over and over again," — leaning behind the boy, bringing his hand caressingly over his head, and lifting the curls from his forehead—"let us steer clear of these mistakes if our friends won't. Boys ought not to be forced into just what is considered good for them; something a little less good for them, if of their own choice, is more likely to result in prosperity in the long-run."

Arthur shook his head, and George sorrowfully remarked: "Ah! you never will see that. I tell you it is a serious time, when boys ought to be allowed to have a voice of their own; and if friends won't listen to it, more's the shame. You, with your liking for mechanics, had better work humbly at first, in some capacity that would open up to larger things, than sit at a desk pining for freedom, and miserable beyond description; ay, rather hire yourself out to a carpenter or cabinetmaker, and do your little piece of work, improving daily, and happy in your station, than for respectability's sake going through a period of martyrdom."

He had spoken warmly, and with sincerity. Arthur appreciated his friend's honest candour, although unable to accept the broad view of their situation. "No," he said with a sigh, "I must go; we shall soon have to part, George, and I shall be sorry, for I owe much to you."

"Don't say anything about that, old fellow. I wish I could have shown you oftener how much I love you. Well, you, of course, will exercise your own discretion in this matter, but I have firmly made *my* mind up not to go to Manchester. No; I will join a circus first, or a menagerie, or a panorama, or any moving exhibition whereby to see the country."

While he was speaking Arthur's eloquent eyes were dwelling upon that dainty girl in the garden, to whom he had given the first love of his boyhood,—a tender affection that Ethel could not be insensible to. Poor sisterless and motherless lad, hungering for kinship with the gentle, alone with the ideals of his youth, to be severed from them all when these school days are over. His friend divined his thought, and said, "Cheer up, Arthur! you will have some one to think of."

With all the march of ideas there are still boys that can blush. Penryllon was one of them. His friend's remark sent the colour flying to his face.

"Never mind me, Beauty, dear, I was only teazing." There was something exceedingly tender and very full of sensitive affection about George's tone, and the way in which he laid a hand upon the other's shoulder.

The boys looked at one another. Upon the threshold of an unknown future they showed mutual affection and sympathy. Then Arthur wrote a respectful affirmative reply to his guardian's letter. George watched the writer as he bent over the paper, with flushed face and an expression of goodness that was imprinted, a deathless memory, upon his heart. He waited patiently until the voice he loved best of all earth's voices bade him come over and read it. A respectful and compliant reply to the letter; and whatever Herrick might think of the spirit of it, there was no disguising that its principle was in the right. "It is certainly better to

commence our crusade with peace than war, however we may end it;" he said, simply.

"I shall be sorry to leave the old place," said Arthur, looking sadly around; "there are so many pleasant memories."

"Hillsland possesses no attraction for me," replied his friend, loftily. "It is associated with bad marks and abominable problems. I shall leave it without compunction and without regret."

Arthur could not help smiling at the mock gravity of his friend's utterance, but he was full of anxiety regarding his future. "Tell me, George, what do you really think of doing?"

Without hesitation George replied, "Act upon the programme I have so often sketched to you: make for Liverpool after our breaking up,—I shall then be on the highway of the world." He waved his hand with an air of confidence; and his friend listened, startled and shuddering, almost seeing the water between them and the beyond. Then he looked dubiously into his friend's black eyes,—he possessed as fine a sense of right and wrong as was ever engrafted in a human soul,—and he knew the course Herrick proposed taking, however it might be represented and excused, was not a right one, hence his disquiet.

"Well, Arthur, you must go in and see the Doctor, and tell him your arrangements." And the boy did so, knocking softly at the door of Dr Virgil's private apartment. It struck him the tone of the permission to enter was unusually agitated. He looked unwell, and when motioning the boy to a seat it was with a painfully abrupt movement. "You have come in relation to your guardian's letter. What are your wishes?" So cold, so calm, his pupil looked towards the face bent over the newspaper he had been reading. Arthur acquainted him. The schoolmaster assented by bowing quietly. He could not object. He knew exactly the modicum of humanity one in his position may possess. He felt annoyed to be so wretchedly dispirited. He walked to a cupboard and took from it a volume in costly binding, presenting it to his young friend with the slightly tremulous remark, "A little remembrance.

Keep it for the sake of your old tutor." The boy was quivering with emotion, and, had he dared, would have liked to kiss the hand placing it in his. "Well, Penryllon," said the Doctor, sitting down sadly, "I have little to say; advice has been so woven with instruction, I need add but few words to the many you have heard me deliver. Bernard of Clairvaux said of his brother Gerard, 'He was not a lettered man, but he possessed that good sense to which letters owe their origin.' We have tried to instruct you in letters, but remember these must be in subjection to good sense, and both must be governed by the loftiness of morals; while Religion you will place pre-eminent above all. Make integrity your standpoint, goodness the aim of your achievement. Be brave, be gentle. Help those weaker. Encourage by a kind word where it can be opportunely addressed. Exercise prudence and discretion. In business remember that gold is not the only ruler, nor put credit above honour. Allurement, in many disguises, will entice you, but hold fast by purity, and cleave to virtue with more than Spartan firmness. Always view beauty with suspicion until you notice excellence in its company. Live for other than, in the words of Eustathius, 'labouring merely for the life below and its splendid ills.' Lift your thoughts, aspirations, and endeavours upward, and God bless them and you."

Leaning an elbow on the table, he looked with grave and fond interest at the boy; then, as by a sudden impulse, invited him by a movement to his side—and the boy went to him, trembling. His master took the two hands, girl-soft and delicately pink as the petals of roses, and held them as we hold that which is reverent to us by approaching loss, convulsively and with pain. "Going to leave me?" he said, with a marvellously tender tone. The boy bowed, diffidently graceful, looking into the other's eyes his sympathy. "You know how sorry I am," said the man, with a quivering lip.

"Yes, I am sure," with an exquisitely grateful look for the love bestowed.

"Will you, to please me, try to banish the figure of a stern master amidst lesson-books, and remember me here, in this

room to-day, pleading to be thought kindly of; will you, Arthur?" The boy's head drooped, lower and lower, while he felt the hands holding his were trembling. "Once or twice I have spoken sharply to you, when I have been over-tried and have felt ill and low; you will forget those words and my hard and unkind manner? It was never meant, Arthur!"

He could not reply, but he pressed the master's hand; sufficient answer. The Doctor put an arm around him, gathering to his heart the fragile form soon to be lost to sight; it had filled his home with sunlight and music, stolen on the dull occupation like an angel visit, and he knew well the blank in store. He would have loved the boy a little less, for parting was very bitter,—so unprepared are we for the emotions connected, and which stand alone, aloof from all other sadnesses, rigidly cruel and inflexible among all other sorrows, austere to the most barren stretch of pain.

As the boy stood thus beside him—he fastening the youthful image upon his heart's memory—a pretty thought came to Arthur, and he acted upon it,—one of those deeds hardly bearing the wide criticism of its record, yet to the man a loveliness that would be treasured for ever. The boy took a pair of scissors from the table and divided the fairest and sunniest of his curls from its lustrous company; even then it twined around his finger as though loath to leave him. He kissed it, enfolded it in paper, and placed it in his master's waistcoat-pocket; all done quickly and silently, with a lightness and delicacy worthy of the gift. The master did not tell him how he felt this; the performance was too beautiful and too sacred in his eyes even to be acknowledged. And this was Arthur Penryllon's closing deed at Hillsland, so far as the Doctor was concerned. When Arthur rejoined Herrick he mentioned little that had passed, and it was chiefly in allusion to the gift of the book, which he admired unselfishly, feeling glad for his friend's sake. The boys spent the remainder of the time together, save one short sweet half-hour when Arthur and Ethel were alone, talking as they had never talked before.

Then came the restlessness, the uncomfortable, unsettling, heart-beating time of taking farewell of those who had been

kind; of the ushers; with the last look at the old dreary rooms, at the desks, at the maps and charts where the world looked so large and so hard. The last ordeal, an affecting good-bye to Herrick. Departure. Looking wistfully from the omnibus at the College boundaries, thinking even the ugly red wall was pretty while the last glimpse remained. Then more utter sinking of the spirits, tears, and an awful sense of loneliness. Jolting of the vehicle, depression of leaden clouds, a hunger to hear again the voices that were ever kind, of those who alone of all the world loved or cared for him. Later on, looking sadly from the window of the train, every roadway of the familiar scene dear to him, the whole to lie mapped upon memory and wandered over in dreams. The line curved a little way on, and he could catch a glimpse of a bit of the garden wall. How his eyes were strained to catch a glimpse also of a pretty girl who of old time had loved to watch the trains go past! And she was there. Not in the distance, but close to the line; had come across the fields as the crow flies, and trespassing beautifully. He leaned out, kissing his hand to her and she to him, looking yearningly after the train as it sped on, and the beautiful face of her boy-lover passed quickly to miniature form, then vanished from her sight.

The compartment was quite full. The boy was lost to all; he saw the sweet face dimly as in dreams, heard a voice from the far distance calling as it was wont to do. He leaned back, reserved and sorrowful. One or two had been intently observing him; with an appearance too prepossessing to escape notice, there was yet an air of taciturn coyness or shyness, the sensitive part of his manner, that kept people from speaking to him. A young man, large by right of littleness, of the cur species, sneeringly asked if he'd left his mother. The boy winced at that; he felt it horribly. There never was a man without some bad quality, and there never was a woman without some good one. A woman answered for him: "Suppose he has," she said, hotly, "it would be better company than you left, I warrant." Whereat he looked the fool he was. Such gentry always want a blunt-spoken woman of the kind at their elbow to keep them within check.

What a long dismal journey it seemed! it was, in fact, but three miles short of a hundred. Then, Euston arrived at and his boxes stored for the time being, the great glittering City opened to him, and he felt less gloomy directly. Oh, it is a fine antidote, is London, to sad remembrance! He revived quickly, and by the time he had taken refreshment felt courageous enough to meet his future masters, and without any loss of time procured a cab and proceeded to their office.

Boggis was drinking from a pewter goblet supplied regularly with half-and-half by the *Friend o' Man*. Blim was holding a bone between finger and thumb, and tearing off shreds of dry-looking meat with a blunt pocket-knife, when a youthful face of uncommon beauty presented itself with some timidity, its owner asking if Messrs Boggis and Blim were within. There was music about the voice such as these rascals had never heard, and an evident refinement that impressed even their coarse senses. Boggis bumped the pewter down heavily on a shelf, Blim gently whisked his bone into a pocket, coughed "Ahem" lightly, and with an ingratiating smile replied that they were within, and "Is it Master Penryllon we are within to?"

"Yes, that is my name," said the boy with diffidence, not taking to this strange pair, nor liking their abode.

"Yes, and so it is. Well, we've been on the look-out for you, Master Penryllon, and we hope you've had a pleasant ride from Leamington."

The boy heard this friendly address with a shy inconfident sense of its being put on, and he shrank from the proffered snare.

"My guardian has written to you, sir, explaining that——"

"It is all settled. You are to stay with us three months on trial, and at the expiration of that time, if you have behaved and been a good boy and studied our interests in every way, it is our purpose to promote you, that is, allow you to be articled to us to learn our profession." And with a patronising and protecting air Mr Blim patted the one on trial softly upon the shoulder. Mr Boggis spoke in addendum, "And if you're no good to us, we'll devilish quick see the back of you!"

Mr Blim laid a fore-finger reprovingly on his partner's arm. "Hush, my dear Mr Boggis, there is no need to be angry, remembering our last young gentleman. Master Penryllon will conduct himself very differently, and I am sure prove both industrious and grateful. Come this way, Arthur, I will show you to your bedroom; and your boxes, where are your boxes?"

"I thought it better to leave them in the cloak-room, until I knew whether they were to be brought here."

"Ah, very thoughtful of you. Yes, our clerk sleeps in the house. Indeed, we place perfect confidence in him, allowing him, so to say, to have absolute control. Mr Boggis and myself live away from our place of business, and in our absence the premises and the whole of our valuable property will be in your care."

The boy looked round with blank dismay. He was to be left alone in that gloomy house of that dreary street; grim echoes of unfurnished chambers, the wintry wind scouring through hollow and vacant passages, broken windows, dust and dirt, comfortless confusion, and the climax of all, that miserable bedroom! Little wonder the boy shuddered, flushed hot, and seemed disposed to burst into tears. He was of exquisite daintiness of ideas and should have met with so different a fate. There is much unfathomed tenderness of character, echoless still songs deep within the heart, fluttering of sighs, like young and timid doves; a knell of petals, as when the heart of a rosebud is broken; a silver-kiss, as when the moonbeam darts in pursuit of itself in some lake; there is the refinement of boyhood before he becomes what the gross call manly. Manly, forsooth! It would be well if men were more boy-like. Noble specimens of manhood Master Penryllon is about to encounter!

"Has my guardian been here?" asked he, anxiously. Hard though that gentleman had always proved, it seemed so impossible that he could have made choice of such a home for a boy's beginning.

"Dear, no!" said Blim, reprovingly; "what a journey for the old gentleman at his time of life! You would not wish it,

surely. Of course he knows us very well—that is to say, as a gentleman of capital knows gentlemen of capital; and he wouldn't allow you to go into *any* professional capacity, nor amongst *any* professional connection, that was not of the highest respectability."

Arthur did not know—he had never given it a thought; judging by past precedent it appeared as though his guardian cared very little about him.

"Well, this is your room; it'll want a sweep up, and I'll show you the cupboard where the brooms are kept. We like our boys to begin at the very foundation in making their fortune, Penryllon; it's the only sure method."

Yes; Penryllon had heard his guardian say so, therefore it must be right. But he looked up at the dirty window where neither blind nor curtain connived at hiding the disgraceful squalor from the neighbours.

"We'll put you a blind up; it was really no use doing so for our last young gentleman, who would get up in his sleep and make away with them—eat 'em, I believe; shouldn't be surprised if he'd got short Venetians instead of ribs!"

Master Penryllon's eyes opening with unmistakable terror at having to occupy the quarters of such a singular youth, Mr Blim led the way down again, where they found the partner-ogre lying back in a chair with his feet pitched up on the ledger open upon the desk. The extreme dishevelled laxity of this struck Penryllon, an observant youth, and he looked with some surprise in the face of the one who was taking the trouble to be agreeable.

"Poor Mr Boggis is a degree eccentric," whispered poor Mr Boggis's partner, not wishing to disturb the deep and regular snoring that proceeded from poor Mr Boggis. And surely did Arthur think this the strangest specimen of business a boy could leave school for.

"I should like to put you a little in the way of what you will have to do, for Mr Boggis and myself are frequently absent,—indeed, we are going upon a journey again shortly, hence our immediate need of some one here, which your guardian has so kindly observed."

And the wakeful partner proceeded, so far as the snoring of Boggis would permit, to put their new pupil in the way of it. A tortuous, unsystematic, shuffling way it was; and vividly did Penryllon recall the noble precepts and loftier training to which he had been accustomed; and very fine, pure, and healthy did Dr Virgil's teaching seem beside this nocent and crafty course of instruction. Blim persevered, for every hour was of object while their great scheme was in abeyance; so soon as their pupil was competent and believed to be trustworthy they would commence operations. And so far Arthur did not discover any arduous or difficult acquirement: he found much that was ingenuously subtle and underhanded, nothing that was honest, respectable, or truthful. And the boy wondered, for if this was the fabric of their business, it was surprising the whole structure did not fall about their ears. And still did Boggis sleep on and snore; it was his invariable method, aided by the *Friend o' Man*, of preparing for important work. He was now qualifying for the important official *rôle* of Government Inspector of Property.

Presently the Inspector awoke; he rolled his feet roughly off the ledger, and shook himself irritably, stared with stupid curiosity at the boy, and mumbled, "Now, you youngster, run up to the public in the court and fetch me a clean churchwarden; and be sharp about it!" The boy looked wonderingly in the face of the agreeable partner, who nodded and smiled, softly stepping out into the passage, followed by Arthur, to whom he explained, "Mr Boggis always likes a smoke after his little nap, and our young gentlemen never mind running errands for us, just to oblige, as we don't keep a servant." Mr Blim himself playfully set the cap upon the pretty head of curls, while saying, "Thank you, Penryllon, I can see already you're going to be a very good boy and of valuable assistance to us." When Blim joined Boggis in the office he addressed him thus, "If you don't look out you'll lose us the infant, and it'll be a pity, for he's as soft as India-rubber, and just what we're wanting. You'll frighten him with your coarseness."

"Now, look here, Blim! if you wanted an angel for a partner, it's a pity you didn't say so at the beginning. I can't

alter my natur; man must have his meals, then his nap, and his smoke arterwards."

"We eat to—be agreeable; for when fasting we are the most disagreeable race amongst mammalia; but you carry it both ways."

"You're too fastidious, my friend; you ought to 'a had a good greasy butcher or tallow-chandler to glide along life with."

"The former. I take the real live butcher to be a more savoury, richly endowed, and choicely fragrant being than the real live tallow-chandler, which is admitting no little."

"Now stow poetry and come off your stilts. How long'll the lad be?"

"Impossible to tell yet. There's a vast difference in sending messages. One class of messenger may be said to represent wire, and another class string, and a precious imperfect message arrives by the stringy ones."

"Now you're going as much the other way. I hates philosophy. Shall we make anything out of him in time?"

"Requires care, twisting; I'm afraid he's a little too natural. But any way he's an improvement on the last."

"Well, I'm a roughish customer, as you know, but I'm natural. I can put up with the people who roll and bowl along, ay, and such as ride and glide along; but by George, Harry, and Dick, I can't abide the creepers and crawlers! and I notice that like snakes such allus have narrow waists, and it's my belief if you take 'em by this and spin round with 'em for ever, you won't find a side you can trust."

To Mr Blim, who prided himself upon his figure, and who was of singularly sinuous and serpentine deportment, this expression appeared strong and uncalled for; but remembering that snakes stand a better chance than most animals of wriggling into the discovery of secret transactions, he honeyed his sting, craftily agreeing with the brusque speaker opposite.

"He's a boy of some character, I can see," remarked Blim; "and character is money, as the comedian observed when out making some quiet studies."

"What's a comedian? Are you one?" asked Boggis.

"No, sir. A comedian is a man whose business it is to play before the public. Mine, on the contrary, is to play behind it. There's a distinction."

"Oh, certainly. And character is money to both of you; is that it?"

Mr Blim looked narrowly at his partner; there was something in this remark, too, he did not quite like.

"On the contrary, money means character; like all other luxuries, we enjoy it as we can afford. And now what about the part you're in training for? Do you feel up to presenting yourself at the Herongate, and going through with it?"

"I don't know anything about that, but if anybody questions my belonging to the Government, I'll knock 'em down, and I believe that'll settle it quicker than a explanation!"

"Indeed, but I beg you won't. Politeness is the mother of prosperity."

"None o' yer texts, if you please—I'm too old to be fed on 'em now; and I do think I ought to have authority to deal in a Government-like manner, else what's the use of my being a Inspector?"

Much provoked, Blim was about to reply, when their new clerk entered with the article for which he had been sent. Mr Boggis proceeded to wax the end of his pipe, during which operation his clear-headed partner was engaged in preparing the routine of duties for their clerk, including the mode of closing and opening their place of business. After the firm had departed, Arthur Penryllon sat down to his solitary uninteresting work, feeling more lonely than ever before in his life. He might get used to it, the sense of wretchedness would perhaps wear off, but George Herrick's words rang in his ears, while the advice he had opposed dragged at him like a reproach.

CHAPTER XLII.

STORMING OF THE HERONGATE: DENOUEMENT.

A MILD agreeable November afternoon. Mary Masheter enjoying the last of autumn's odorous hours. Wilson, their faithful servant, wheeling his young lady in her luxurious invalid chair: not beyond the garden, for it was so spacious there was no necessity.

Resigned under her affliction, and sweetly patient, not a murmur escaped her when she saw others enjoying the delightful weather. And Mary valued their garden, as every gentle invalid, who cannot get beyond it, does value a demesne of the kind; its flowery parts were all learnt of long solitary hours, its shaded paths and embowered retreats were endeared by the musings of her constrained seclusion. No one intruded upon her sacred groves save her dignified white-haired father, Cobham Masheter, and, when Etta was staying with them, that ever-welcome, pretty, cheerful cousin.

No words can tell Mr Masheter's love for his invalid, nor describe the constant devotion of which she was the object. He lived for his daughter. His every thought was how to relieve her sufferings, how to cheer her lonely hours. Yet she was not altogether lonely. Her mind was of that order which is a wealth of company unto itself. Deeply read, familiar with the highest literature, in true soul-sympathy with the loftiest minds, her solitude was peopled with the most sublime companionship, and her silent associates were among the noblest of the world. A nature that can thus adapt itself, and render of that which would else be irksome a very para-

dise, must have in itself an element of sweetness apart altogether from its grace of submission. Especially was this the case with Mary Masheter, whose disposition was so placid and whose temperament was so contented, it seemed the purpose of her life to teach the lesson of the highest goodness.

Unrest and feverishness, the yearning for continuous novelty, the fickle pursuit of pleasure, and the employment and enjoyment of trivialities for the misspending of God's precious time, were all unknown to her meek and chastened heart.

The hours went wearily, perhaps, at times, but they were tinted by her fancy and lost half their leaden hue; if silence became oppressive she would sing softly to herself some sacred lyric, or the refined ballads of her cousin Theodore. To some of these she had supplied the words,—pretty verses breathing of hope and sunshine, characterised by a choice sincerity and brightness of promise that rendered them rare in their way.

Despite her content, nestled persistently and upon principle, Mary endured pain of which she would not allow her lips to tell one word. Her complaint was spinal, and involved suffering that could not be described, and so continuous, it would have looked like for ever complaining and repining. She entertained a sensitive dread of being thought peevish or fretful, and felt a devout thankfulness for the mercies conceded her in that happy home and loving parent. This fine patience was the more excellent since her malady disposes the brain to acute irritability, while the multitudinous nerve-fibres conveying motion and sensation are susceptible to every untoward influence and keep the body in a state of perpetual quivering.

Upon this genial afternoon her father came walking to her with an air of unusual cheerfulness, holding an open letter in his hand, which he smilingly waved while advancing, and much Mary wondered concerning its contents,—from Theodore, perhaps.

"Hear this, my dear!" said Mr Masheter joyfully, and reading the letter aloud:—

THE INSTITUTE OF GALVANISM AND ELECTRICITY,
GREAT MALVERN, WORCESTERSHIRE.
Nov. 10, 18—.

MY DEAR SIR,—*Although I have not, personally, the honour of your acquaintance, I am, I believe, so extensively known to your friends, that a more formal introduction is unnecessary, the Professor's chair of this Institute being, I may say, as much a matter of national importance as it is a national need. You will have heard of me as one who has devoted a life and fortune to that pursuit it is at once my privilege and glory to follow—the alleviation of pain by means of those unfailing remedies science places at our disposal. Sir, I do not believe in testimonials, and I think the well-informed generally are suspicious of them: patients write, "You are quite at liberty to make what use you please of this letter;" I prefer to treat all such letters in simple confidence. To me, when a cure has been effected, it should be too sacred a thing to be canvassed over the length and breadth of the country. I am of singularly honest and straightforward principles, and the slightest approach to charlatanism or quackery offends my sense of integrity. I do not advertise. My method of making our institution known is by private letter. I am in communication with the chief landowners of the United Kingdom; and, as far as available, my services are at the command of suffering. I shall visit Suffolk professionally from the 12th to the 20th inclusive, time permitting. If you have any need of my services I will do myself the honour of calling upon you, and meantime subscribe myself your obedient servant,*

NAPOLEON CRICK.

"Now there is something honest about the look of this, my darling; it is very different to the detestable circulars so often received and the sole underlying motive of which is the gain of lucre."

The invalid passed no reply; he had expended so much in the attempt to relieve her pain. Certainly they had not touched galvanism and electricity, but then they were not yet converts to belief in those sciences; there was no telling what they might do when the subject was properly put before

them by so qualified a practitioner as the Professor of the Malvern Institute. The very name of the place—every one knew something by reputation of it, most people not quite what; it was generally supposed something in the cold water way, but then all these uncertain relations to therapeutics seemed akin.

"Shall you see this person, papa?"

"Well, I think so; we can but hear his explanation of the curative properties of electricity."

While walking beside his daughter's chair, as he placed the letter in his pocket-book, Mr Masheter saw two gentlemen walk gravely up to the front door and gravely knock and ring. They had walked up arm in arm, with prodigious weight; at the door they divided, standing like a Prime Minister and a Chancellor of the Exchequer looking at each other. They were kept waiting some little time; one addressed a few words to the other who bowed gravely, and his companion rang again. Mr Masheter felt annoyed that they should have been kept waiting, but would not have left his daughter's chair until it came round to the entrance had both Houses of Parliament been waiting. As it happened he knew the visitors to be two of the Messrs Tomkins of Ipswich, although he could not say which two.

Wilson wheeled smoothly round the quiet leaf-strewn paths, waste foliage unswept from these retired garden circuits purposely, and forming a variegated autumn carpet: brown fallings from the sycamores, lemon-yellow from the ash, orange from the elms, blown from beyond the garden precincts, mixing with dry laurels, soft spears of fir, and the glory of long avenues of dahlia doffed with disdain when the fine fashion changed. Over this softly rolled the wheels, and those with the chair trod softly. All was composing and quiet, even the monotonous cawing of the rooks failed to dispel the pleasant calmness.

"I hope you will not feel dull now cousin Gascoyne has gone, Mary?"

"Oh no, papa, I can never feel dull so long as you are at home!"

"We shall be very quiet up to Christmas. By the way, do you prefer remaining here next month, or joining the Lutes at Bournemouth?"

"I will leave it to you; I like Bournemouth."

Presently the party arrived by the front entrance, and Mr Masheter went at once to the waiting visitors.

"Good morning, gentlemen."

"Good morning, Mr Masheter. We were out walking this way, and could not resist the temptation of calling to inquire after Miss Masheter's health."

"I am obliged to you. My daughter enjoys but indifferent health still; she is unable to get about."

"How extremely sad!" murmured Mr Adam, while Mr Seth looked the sympathy his brother expressed.

"What a grand old place you have here! Seth said, 'Don't go in, we shall be intruding.' I said, 'I cannot help it; now we have walked so far I must have a look at the front.' Ah, you are to be envied, Mr Masheter!"

The owner of the Herongate smiled kindly. "You have a pretty box yourselves, gentlemen."

"We had. The workmen have turned it into a pandemonium, whence all the ill smells in painterdom combine to eject the occupiers. We've been looking high and low for apartments; but I don't know what the Ipswich people have come to; we should be sorry to set foot in any of them; worse than the paint, I do think. What say you, Brother Seth?"

"Cleanliness is next to godliness—one indicates the other. There are certain places we could not stay at and retain our self-respect."

"I agree with you, Brother; you but express the thoughts of my own mind." Mr Adam looked round with almost an approach to playfulness. "Now, if we had only brought our dressing-case and a portmanteau, we should have positively refused to quit *this* hospitable shelter."

Mr Masheter caught the good-humoured twinkle in the eyes of the decorous speaker and smiled also.

"What a long walk it is!" said Mr Seth. "I had no idea it was half so far!"

"I believe your cousin has left you?" said Mr Adam; "we did not see him in church. You'll find it dull. Miss Masheter should not be allowed to muse, and the sight of a vacant chair is so very depressing."

"No; I try to keep Mary from it as much as possible."

"You should never be without some one here; the house is so large, there are so many empty rooms. To any one nervously affected it exercises a most retarding influence."

The anxiety upon the father's brow deepened. He was for ever devising some plan to lighten the depression he was certain she experienced, although she never complained. There was something feeling and sympathetic about these gentlemen, that stole upon his gratitude. Every one spoke kindly of his daughter, but not every one in this feeling and sympathetic manner. Of course it was accounted for. Mr Masheter knew the high respect in which these gentlemen were held; the beneficent expression, the bland philanthropy, the humane compassion, were patent upon the very face of them. Mr Masheter took out Professor Napoleon Crick's letter, and handed it to Mr Adam to read.

"Tell me what you think of that, sir?"

Mr Adam drew his mouth up tightly, read the letter slowly, and handed it to Mr Seth, looking at that Brother with immense gravity. Mr Seth read it slowly, and his mouth drew up tightly, while he gravely handed it back to Brother Adam.

"Dangerous!" was the ominous word uttered by the elder critic.

"I thought of hearing what he had to say."

"How I wish we could be present!" then, as if struck by a sudden thought, "I am so careful not to offend against delicacy, always; but if you will pardon the idea, it has occurred to me that you might allow my brother and myself to remain a week or ten days; I don't like to say at any rate of acknowledgment you care to propose — really this is almost too delicate for discussion, and yet, *do* pardon me, we would consider any rate proposed inadequate, under the circumstances, for the pleasure of sojourning a few days in this fine old hall."

"Make yourself easy, sir," said the owner, with the char-

acteristic grace of the real old English gentleman, "I shall be happy to see you remain as *my guests*, during the engagement of workmen at your house!"

Mr Adam looked across at his brother with gratified surprise, remarking, "This is really too generous, I feel it deeply; I—I hope it may be in our power to furnish golden testimony of our gratitude. Brother, you will return, and put together our few requirements; and drive over, there's a good soul, or you will be worn out."

Mr Seth had scarcely departed when an unwarrantable disturbance was heard, and caused the owner of the Herongate to lift his eyebrows much surprised and a little wounded; it was his pride for his daughter's sake to preserve the patrician quietude inviolate. Some person was remonstrating with the servants, and in a manner which struck the owner as being decidedly rough and coarse. Then was heard this—affecting the two gentlemen in different ways: "But I tell you Mr Masheter does know us; cards ain't wanted; we've never carried 'em since we left business; if there's any doubt about us, my son here, Mr Phineas, will walk in and announce his father! For'ards, Phineas, boy! hunt 'em up somehow! Hullo! why, if this isn't the old felt of the Mister Tomkins, band upside down as usual!" The voice had stopped by the hat-stand. Mr Masheter's annoyance was extreme. "I wish to goodness Gascoyne was here!" he muttered. In a minute or two Mr Beaver bounced in, red, happy, brimming over with geniality which made the beneficence of Mr Tomkins look quite sombre. He was followed up by Phineas, junior, carrying a flat and singularly shaped box, at which Mr Adam instantly directed his examining gaze. "So we've found you at last!" cried the old gentleman, with such evident and honest delight, Mr Masheter could not display the cold deportment he had intended. "We have never forgotten that happy evening at Friend Clark's. I said to my boy Phineas, 'There's a true Englishman, God bless him! And though we be humble, and our money be gained by honest toil, he is one who won't despise us, nor make us feel we're so many grades below him; he's the wrong sort of man for that, and I'll trust him, I'll

trust him!' Well, them's my words to Phineas; and mine to you is as I would speak to the representative of my fellow-countrymen, the qualified to advise. I want to put a matter to you, asking your counsel, with the determination to abide by your opinion!"

During the delivery of this vague speech the Beaver stood with his hands behind, under his coat-tails, and chanticleer fashion strutted up and down before the bewildered Mr Masheter, who, partly amused, partly disgusted, thought this was the most extraordinary of all the strange and unpleasant characters he had ever met with.

"I don't think I understand you, Mr Beaver, now. The purpose of this visit, be good enough to explain?"

"Well, a really more honourable or more pleasant office could not be imposed upon me; but we will retire; you've a little counting-house or something, perhaps? I can't bring forward my business with cold grumpy-looking strangers about, although, to be sure, it's all hot-pressed and ready, as one may say."

Making a virtue of necessity, and thinking it in all probability the quickest and most peaceable method of settling the effusive stranger, Mr Masheter led the way to his study, having apologised to Mr Tomkins for leaving him.

"Oh, never mind," said Mr Tomkins, affably, "I'll take a stroll round the garden."

Mr Beaver, not to be outdone in affability, immediately exclaimed, "My boy, Phineas, will accompany you, sir, while I am having my little talk to Mr Masheter. Join the gentleman, Phineas, and be upon your best behaviour, sirrah; any friend of Mr Masheter's commands our best respects."

Although Mr Adam might chafe under it, so the more leech-like would stick the amphibious Phineas.

"Now, Mr Beaver," said Mr Masheter, when they were seated, "let's hear what you have to say, and do not be long please, as my daughter is alone."

"You have struck the key-note of my discourse—you have indeed, sir, and have quite touched me: Mrs Beaver was afflicted—great sufferer—resigned and patient as an hangel,

and with her last breath almost, while placing my boy Phineas in my arms, she implored that I would found an asylum for the poor of her sex afflicted in like manner. Now you know as well as possible I'm an illiterate person—my experience is only trade experience; I have no knowledge of how to set about it; and I am afraid to put myself in the hands of mere speculators—we know how they use people with money. Thus at a loss I thought of applying to you, of asking leave to place in your hands thirty thousand pounds to be judiciously expended, as your wisdom may suggest. I want to perpetuate the goodness, long-suffering, and silent heroism of that most saint-like woman, excuse me."

Affected, probably easily affected, in spite of his pleasant temperament, the old gentleman made liberal use of a tremendous-pocket handkerchief, and then continued; his auditor listening with visible interest.

"We shall want lady patronesses, and I thought, perhaps, your daughter might not withhold her sanction."

"I am sure my daughter will be happy to aid so good a work," said Mr Masheter, warmly; "I'm very glad you introduced it to me."

"There! I knew you would be; you've made good my words. I said to Phineas, 'I may be charged, so to say, with philanthropy, but it is useless to think of competing with Mr Masheter, if I am any judge of character,' and after being in business the best part o' your life you come to know people pretty well. You would see the case brought in by my boy? Well, that contains plans and models, and we'll have to go thoroughly into them. Not just now, nor to-morrow, perhaps, but before we go away——"

"I beg pardon," interrupted Mr Masheter.

"Didn't I tell you? Well, that's just like me, upon my word; too blunt and outspoken before having properly paved the way; we paid off our score at the hotel, quite depending on your taking pity on my years. I really can't undertake the running backwards and forwards, and spending no end of money in cab-hire every day, money that may be better expended; and I can't agree to do it by letter-writing—I'm nothing of a letter-

writer, never was. I see no way out of it but to stop; it seems abrupt to propose it one's self too, but if *you* won't, what is one to do?" Mr Beaver asked this with so perfectly innocent a manner Mr Masheter did really take him for a veritable child of nature, guileless, simple, imposing upon one and taking the advantage of good-nature not so much by audaciousness as by the unfettered good-nature within himself; this was the aspect presented to the view of the unsuspicious, although easily wounded, Cobham Masheter. It was something new certainly, and something impudent, for a man to walk into another person's house and to invite himself to remain there; but then you can't exercise the laws usually applied in regard to the binding down of a being of this order, for, like an unwired cork, he would bound through all such laws and come down as light, as genial as ever. Mr Masheter clearly did not know what to do, he dissented from the principle, all his Conservative antagonism went out against it, but on the other hand he distinctly shunned the feeling of conscious churlishness, while an inhospitable spirit was highly repugnant to him. And he certainly had found this person staying at Clark's, his respected tenant's, so he was not like an absolute stranger: and this scheme of his was so broad, and appealed so strongly to the tender-hearted father of one afflicted, he really could not say nay.

"Perhaps it will be better if you remain beneath my roof a day or two, Mr Beaver, or, at all events, until we get things into shape. I beg to assure you I shall be glad to join also in the matter of the outlay, not upon so large a scale as yourself, but in proportion to my accustomed contributions to such charities."

Mr Beaver started up, and darted over to his host, upon whose shoulder he brought his hand down heavily, and in jolly fashion cried, "You're a brick—as true as George, you are! Forgive my exuberance; I never keep nothing back, and gratitude's a most hateful thing iced!"

The originality of this sentiment struck Mr Masheter.

Now, while this was occurring in the study, the following movements had taken place in the garden.

Mr Adam walked very straight, admiring the beauties of nature nevertheless. Unconsciously, as it were, his steps led him in the direction of the fine old Cedar, beside which he paused, and looking Phineas full in the eyes with a hard scrutinizing gaze, he remarked, "Fine old tree, sir; the most valuable in the garden, I should imagine?"

"It's a hash, isn't it?" asked Phineas, looking up at it with pretended stupidity.

The member of the Great Tomkins Family bit his lip severely, and they walked on. His equability was to be yet further disturbed, for he shortly afterwards descried the adventurous Mr Noah advancing.

"Thought I should find you here," said the latter, quietly; "I met Seth, and asked him to bring my things on as well. Charming day; seems to lift one above this grovelling earth!"

"Will you walk on?" said Mr Adam to Phineas.

In the neighbourhood of the great prize the opponents by tacit consent would waive dissension: the arena was seized, it would be held, and more were coming. No end likely to advance their object would be gained by bickering; disputes would result in exposure of their cards: outstanding feuds must be settled afterwards, elsewhere. Here all must be amicable and placid brotherly love. It would be a contest of skill only—the supremacy of strategy. Mr Adam recognised this. "We will preserve the appearance of our old relationship," he remarked aside to Brother Noah, "until myself and dear Brother Seth have an opportunity for inquiring, in conjunction with our solicitor, into recent sad affairs. There has been a great departure from integrity and virtue, Brother, and our souls mourn over you; but justice is inexorable, and equity will not be tampered with. If it breaks our hearts to dissever the loving bonds that have united us, the obligations of our agreement demand that no sentimental feelings shall interpose. For the present, however, we need the full weight of our combined respectability to thwart the miserable schemers hovering, I can see, like so many obscene birds of prey over our good friend, to whom we feel all the more closely attached

from the fact of his being a neighbour and a worshipper at the same church."

Mr Noah gravely put his hand in that of his model relative, who gravely pressed it; they linked arms, the little spring lifted them in exact readjustment of fraternal standing, and they marched back, past the Cedar.

Mr Masheter stood in the doorway, somewhat astonished to see the third Tomkins, although perfectly aware they never were very far apart.

"Our laggard has arrived, Mr Masheter; I told him, a little more and he would not have got in!"—and with the courteous pleasantry of a prelate Mr Adam introduced his Brother, with whom Mr Masheter shook hands.

"Make yourselves at home, gentlemen; I must be returning to my daughter. I cannot say, yet, whether she will feel well enough to be present during dinner; if not, pardon my absence, and pray entertain yourselves without reserve." This hospitable address was for the edification of all. The ecstatic Beaver rubbed his hands gleefully, and skipped "Sir Roger" down the passage, greatly to the disgust of the fastidious disciples of Oxford-mixture: he looked around, warily, half expecting to see the indefatigable geologist. Oliver Redland's preparations, however, were not sufficiently advanced.

Mr Masheter hastened to inform his daughter of what had occurred. If surprised, Miss Masheter did not display the feeling, perfectly satisfied with every arrangement of her fond parent; but she preferred not to see the visitors, or at all events not that evening.

The Brothers Tomkins arose early upon the following morning, but not so early as their host, for, upon drawing up the blinds of their bedroom windows, they discovered him standing on the lawn in company with a tall gentlemanly person, who held in one hand an unrolled parchment, while with his other he seemed indicating vigorous propositions. He might be an architect, or a landscape gardener, goodness knew what; but in any case the Brothers ought to know, and meant to know, and they went down accordingly, in line—Adam first, Noah last, with a sly look at a pretty girl

with dust-pan and broom just going up the stairs. Mr Noah was much hurt by his arraignment, and naturally felt curious concerning a sex whom he was accused of coming in juxtaposition with.

Mr Masheter having greeted the three thoughtful-looking gentlemen, handed them a card with this announcement:—

PAXTON BLIM,

Landscape Gardener

to Her Majesty.

The gentlemen glanced from the card to the Queen's Landscape Gardener, and Mr Adam sighed; but whether for the Queen, the gardener, or himself is uncertain. Perhaps he was thinking of another gardener that once made a very grave mistake.

"This gentleman has fairly been taking my breath away, Mr Adam! He proposes an entire reconstruction of the grounds—is in favour of a classical, and, as it seems to me, poetical design, very pleasing to the eye no doubt; artistically planned, and in strict accordance with elegance and beauty. I am decidedly in favour of the project, I must confess, but I am dubious of gaining my daughter's approval; she is so fond of her wilderness, as she calls it."

Mr Paxton Blim bowed politely, and respectfully suggested that the shady paths would remain, but would take the form of Athenian groves, with a column here, a statue there, a miniature temple somewhere else; and the general romance and elevation of mind produced by it could not but perfect the influence exercised generally by such retired retreats.

"And you say that Cedar would have to come up? I am attached to that Cedar."

"I remarked, sir, that it would be rather out of character with our design, and I proposed its removal nearer the other trees. What do you say, gentlemen?" asked with a sudden turn upon the three, whom it took, however, by no means unawares. Mr Seth looked first right, then left, for concurrence, and answered, "We are of opinion, if the design submitted is adopted, it would certainly be necessary to alter the position of the tree."

"Are you, now?" said the owner of the tree, with a slightly troubled expression. "I regret that you should support our friend here, for that tree, like the house, is historical. It was standing in Queen Anne's day, and has always been a favourite with the successive owners of the house."

"Dear me!" repeated the Brothers in chorus, contemplating the mountain monarch with reverence.

"I am not sure, but I fancy I must have heard Her Majesty allude to it, when she was graciously speaking to me of the historic gardens of England." Paxton Blim uttered this with a quietness leaving no doubt of its truth. There was no shadow of pretension or importance about Paxton Blim. Like every genuine artist he was lost in his work; self was merged in soul, and the undecorated genius presented itself to the inspection of mankind.

"I think, Mr Blim, our garden is chiefly historic from its having belonged to the notorious miser, Saul Weir, some time connected with the South Sea Scheme directorate!"

"You don't say so!" murmured Mr Blim, with rapt interest. "It makes the grounds additionally interesting — don't you think so, gentlemen?"

The Brothers unanimously thought so.

An upper window was thrown open, and a jovial voice cried down to them, "The top o' the morning to you! I can't get up at your hour, but I'll soon be with you!" It was the light-hearted Beaver, leaning out, night-cap on head, razor in hand, red cheeks hanging like fruit amongst the ivy surrounding the frame. The Gardener to Her Majesty took a long hard look at that apparition.

"Extraordinary man!" said Mr Masheter, as the party

turned round to the garden again; "he enjoys a continuous flow of innocent animal spirits. He reminds me of the embodiment of philanthropy as I have sometimes seen it depicted by the caricaturists."

"We must be very careful lest we misjudge any fellow-creature," said Mr Noah after a somewhat dolorous manner.

"Good gracious, my dear sir, I had no such intention, I am sure! But to return to our plans. You have the design for the new order of things properly outlined, I think you told me, Mr Blim?"

"They are in my portfolio, sir. I left them in charge of the servant, with my carpet-bag and case of implements. I drove over thus early because I am used to early hours; and in matters of business I believe in taking time by the forelock. What say you, gentlemen?"

"Very proper," said Mr Adam; "Highly commendable," added Mr Seth.

"Excuse me. You mentioned that you drove over. Of course I fancied so from the weight of your encumbrances. But your horse and vehicle? I——"

"Oh, I—pardon my interrupting you—I was going to say I sent that back so soon as I ascertained you were at home. They charge by time at the hotel-stables I hired at; and I am by no means a man of superabundant wealth. Do, pray, pardon me if I have unwarrantably transgressed."

"Not at all; do not mention it. I did not intend you to think so. You will take breakfast with my friends here, and after breakfast we will go into the matter. In the meantime, I will speak to my daughter about it."

"Perhaps if Miss Masheter could be present she could assist me to convey a more full—and I am sure a better—idea of the plans," ventured the artist, deferentially.

"It shall be entirely regulated by Miss Masheter's pleasure, sir;" and, with a courteous inclination of the head, the old gentleman left the group. Entering the house, Mr Beaver ran against him, goat-fashion. The genial one had evidently hurried down-stairs. He was very much out of breath. He apologised. "Just coming to see who that chap is. Queer-

looking customer, anyway. You know I go by the shape of people's heads."

"You are a student of phrenology?"

"Well, you can give it that name if you like. In the trade we used to call it taking the measure."

Mr Masheter shrank slightly, and passed on. Mr Beaver walked up to the group. He nodded, in a friendly way, that might, possibly, indicate having seen Mr Blim before. "I do think the more the merrier. And have you come to stop, sir?" The stranger was slightly disconcerted by the blunt question.

"I am here upon business, sir."

"Of course, of course. I didn't suppose, from the look of you, that you were a friend of the family. And how are *you* this morning?"—to Mr Adam, giving that recoiling gentleman a vigorous poke in the ribs. Mr Adam's dignity was wounded. He drew off his party, incensed, and perambulated the Athenian groves.

Mr Masheter, meanwhile, was talking with his daughter. Upon entering her elegant morning-room, where it was his custom to breakfast with her, he found her reading a note received by that morning's post.

"Mrs Steele will be here to-day, papa dear."

"Oh, she has completed her arrangements rather sooner than she thought possible, then?"

"She says, in her anxiety to enter quickly upon her duties she has hastened the settlement of her affairs. It is very sad to be left like that, with no one to manage nor advise."

"Upon each occasion when Mrs Steele called here she gave me the idea of being a person fully equal to managing her own affairs."

"You do not dislike her, papa?"—asked with eager anxiety.

"By no means; and if I did, your judgment is better than mine. She is most certainly cultured and highly informed, and has evidently known great reverses; the only thing I disapproved of was the peculiar system she adopted of obtaining the situation—a situation that did not exist till she created it."

"Her argument was, that advertisements are barely respectable, and invariably attended with adventure and risk upon both sides. A gentlewoman, she says, instinctively shuns them, and prefers to call privately where there is a possibility of her services being not only accepted but valued."

"The argument is a specious one; and more favourable still was the impression she exercised upon my compassionate, tender-hearted darling."

"And, papa, you must remember I have never had a 'companion.' Perhaps the novelty pleased me."

"You should have had, but have always been contented with your maid. And I think I remember a certain young lady, some time ago, telling me that a companion would fidget her dreadfully, and that she would not know what to do with her."

"Ah, but papa, I did not then have a superior person of this sort in mind," replied the young lady, laughingly. He patted her soft brown hair very fondly.

"Well, I hope you will get along with her happily, my dear. What train is she coming by? We must send the carriage over."

"It arrives at three o'clock at Ipswich."

Looking out of the window, Mr Masheter saw an individual walking briskly up to the house, followed by a page-boy bearing a large black case. There was something imperative, important, and decidedly professional-looking about this person. Hastily ringing the bell, he himself opened the glass door admitting to the passage. It was evidently a person to whom time was of object. He savoured somewhat of the physician order; but there was also a smack of the professor about him. It was the versatile Napoleon Crick, and his "get up" was perfection.

"Do excuse me, my dear. If I am not mistaken, this is the writer of the Malvern letter."

While Napoleon Crick stood one foot upon the threshold, Paxton Blim entered from the garden; and these interchanged a rat-like leer. They understood the situation perfectly. The servants at the Herongate being constitutionally slow,

Mr Masheter had spoken to the gentleman, and conducted him to his study, before they appeared.

"I have the honour of addressing Mr Masheter, the father of Miss Masheter, a lady who has, I understand, been a great sufferer?"

"The same, sir. And you are Mr Crick——"

"Professor Crick," corrected the other, blandly, with an abrupt bow.

"I have read your prospectus, sir——"

"Circular note, sir," again corrected the medical gentleman, with another abrupt bow. This was evidently a person who liked to be right before the world.

"Yes; and I am prepared to hear an explanation of your theories——"

"No, sir; I am here to put those theories into practice. Admitted the lady is a confirmed sufferer, it is consistent to suppose all other means have been tried, and without any satisfactory result. Electricity is accepted after everything else. It does not need the preliminary exposition. Half favour only is shown to it; but it is independent enough, on its own merits, to act without pretension."

Mr Masheter thought the Professor bluff as Abernethy. The Professor declined an explanation, for a very good reason, —he knew as little of the science as of honesty.

"What is the *modus operandi*, Professor Crick?"

"Faith, sir, first, without which we can do nothing; patience next. We proceed steadily, little by little, gradually increasing the power of the application. A shock is a shock, sir. Our skill is to compel the shock to be reparative, not debilitating."

"I quite understand that. Under certain conditions I believe cures have, happily, been effected."

"Under the conditions I have mentioned. Infirmity is a solemn matter; release from that infirmity scarcely less so. It does not do to trifle with either. Hurry is trifling. We permit nature to adapt itself; and nature is invariably slow—supreme, sure, but slow. Miss Masheter may be under my care a week, or ten days. It is impossible to calculate to a day

the duration of the case. During that time I must trespass upon your hospitality for a bed."

Having thus arranged matters, Mr Masheter invited the gentleman to the breakfast-room, while he proceeded to acquaint Mary with what had occurred. The Professor maintained his professional impudence quite upon a par with the other jackals assembled. It is as well to account for the odd firm's knowledge of the Herongate clue. The housekeeper in the service of Saul Weir, but more extensively in the pay of the firm next door, had not been long in informing them of the resuscitation of the carpenter, and, later, of the valuable interpretation of the book's secret, overheard by her at the door; and the firm was not slow, either, in vacating their premises, or acting upon the information thus acquired. Two of them —Crick and Jebeson—determined to run the gauntlet. Jebeson was on the way. Wattle had too great regard for his portly and easy-going self to venture it; nor was he needed, since he indirectly lived and acted rather for ornament than use.

Mr Masheter was summoned away from his daughter by a less portly, although not less important, person—no other, indeed, than the great Dobson, who called, as intended, to represent the recreative influence upon the mind of a fine "First-class Artistic Pictorial Exhibition, realising the Wonders of Scenic Grandeur upon the Continent,"—in fact, to solicit the honour of exhibiting his well-known Panorama in the hall of the Herongate, or in any chamber of adequate dimensions. And again the invalid was put forward as the plea for the liberty of the intrusion. Mr Masheter began to rub his eyes, and look as though a special interposition in behalf of his daughter was in progress. Of course he assented, very gladly—was pleased to afford his lonely one the little amusement. The Panorama should be fixed in the large dining-room, if of sufficient loftiness, and exhibited upon the following morning. The arrangement suited Mr Dobson, who did not open in Ipswich until Monday. He found the height of the room and everything else mutually satisfactory; and so ended the interview.

The party of jackals formed the most speculative opinions concerning the renowned Dobson, whom they scrutinised keenly on his approach, taking that honest one to be "one of them."

It is unnecessary to recount any further incidents until the return of the carriage despatched for Mrs Steele. That lady duly appeared, but also, to the amazement of the owner of the Herongate, an imposing, white-haired individual in a velvet coat, with a negligent air about him characteristic if not ingratiating; and this unexpected importation caused wonder. The gentleman did not allow it to continue, for with a brusque dignity that left no doubt of his social quality, he sent in his card, requesting the servant to explain to Mr Masheter that he was about coming over to pay his respects to him, and finding the Herongate carriage waiting at the station for a passenger he availed himself of the convenience and rode over with the lady. This was explained. Mr Masheter read upon the card a name known to him—known, one may say, to the whole body of the art-loving public—and at once saw the eminent painter, Peter Paul Potter.

"Glad to meet you, Mr Masheter," said the painter with expression, jerkily running his fingers through the hair lying untidy and reckless above the broad wrinkled forehead; "we met once before at the town-house of your relative, Lord Gascoyne."

"Did we? Upon my honour, I had quite forgotten it."

"I then asked you, if some day in the future I should have the honour of painting the portrait of your only child!"

"Did you? My memory seems to be failing me of late; I have not the slightest recollection of the circumstance."

"A common feature of age, my dear sir; I am just the same, but I counteract it by making notes. However, you answered, 'Nothing would give me greater pleasure; come over whenever you can.'"

Poor Mr Masheter, dazed and bewildered, could only reply, "Did I? Then I beg your pardon; I shall be happy for you to paint my daughter's portrait, the more so as we have not one in oils."

"My servant is coming on with all materials, and my carpet-bag." Mr Masheter would dream of carpet-bags, portmanteaux, and valises, for a month to come.

Mrs Steele, meantime, was making herself at home. Her honeyed words and cleverly-assumed endearing manners confirmed Miss Masheter's prepossession in her favour. At dinner, Mrs Steele was introduced to the company, and the calm electric eyes of Professor Crick searchingly examined the lady, who, the single representative of her sex at table, acquitted herself with a self-possession that caused the Brothers Tomkins to shudder.

"Highly charged with magnetism!" whispered Professor Crick to Peter Paul Potter, next to whom he was seated: he was still observing the lady.

"A conductor, perhaps!" muttered Mr Potter, surlily. His dignity was affronted by having to sit down with this mixed party. "Worse than a *table d'hôte!*" groaned the great painter.

This congress of wolves and jackals only wanted the presence of the Mormon to make it complete; that worthy was otherwise engaged, in watching and waiting his opportunity on board the ship wherein Noeba Edred jealously guarded her iron case.

It was really astonishing that a body of Englishmen should be so united in one opinion, admiration of the gardens and their primary ornament, the Cedar of Lebanon. Which of the schemers would vanquish the others? How would the object be set about and the body out-manœuvred by the most daring, looked at present a matter of uncertainty; and events were not improved upon the following day, when an Australian sheep-farmer, in a large way of business, put in an appearance and left no doubt of his having come to stop, supposing, of course, Mr Masheter was disposed to entertain his offers of purchase. The Herongate flocks had *prestige* beyond Suffolk; and the visit did not surprise the owner, who walked to the folds and through the pastures with his shepherds and the Australian dealer to the satisfaction of both. "And now, Mr Masheter, there's a man named Eli Jebeson, with the biggest grazing tract going, and if you've got any more cattle to sell, let's see 'em and then we'll go in and drink to the

prosperity of our several countries. We've done a pretty good morning's work, and if there's one man as does like to buy where the stock is right, that man, sir, is Eli Jebeson; straightforward, without beating about the bush, although I've had plenty o' that in my time. I think we understand one another; in our country a salesman stops the night with us for a friendly draw and talk about the old country, I shall have pleasure in doing so, and thank ye." Mr Masheter thought this Australian the coolest person he had seen yet, and really he began to wonder what had come to the Herongate. Had he been a gentleman of less equably tempered nature he would have effected a speedy clearance of the whole crew; but it had all happened so naturally, and so many of these persons were of station and respectability, it was impossible to take any steps, nor did he see necessity, being entirely unsuspicious.

In the garden the dealer from Australia was introduced to Professor Napoleon Crick (at whom he gazed with much interest) and the other gentlemen, and to the lady charged with magnetism otherwise described as a conductor, at whom Eli Jebeson also gazed with profound, if not sentimental, interest.

Mr Masheter was well pleased with his disposal of stock, and was busy at the desk in his study when the servant appeared with another card and to say a gentleman would like to see him if disengaged. The card bore the name of *Mr Ranger, On Her Majesty's Service:* the latter attracted notice, the name itself might have escaped. "Another of Her Majesty's servants," thought Mr Masheter; he nodded his head, the gentleman was shown in, Mr Masheter laid down his pen; "Yes, sir?"

"I have the honour to represent the Admiralty. I am the purchaser of timber for the Royal Navy. I have authority for arranging consignments to the dockyards. I believe you have at different periods disposed of timber?"

"Some years ago I had the woods thinned; I think it well at intervals."

The solemn-looking Government official merely bowed.

"May I ask, sir, if you feel disposed to clear more of your woodland? I am prepared to treat liberally for the purchase of oak, cedar, locust, &c. If you are willing I shall be

happy to walk through the woods—at no great distance off, I imagine?"

"Oh dear, no. Well, since you have called about it—er, you do not call again for some time, I suppose?"

"About once in each ten years."

"Ah, just so. Well, we will walk through, there are several trees on the outskirts might be felled."

"Fine old cedar on the lawn I noticed as I came in."

"Yes. My friends are wanting me to remove it, which I am reluctant to do."

"I should think so. Very ornamental; removal calculated to injure it: if you *do*, I'll let you have some of our men, providing we arrange about these we are going to look at. Our men understand the science of it, and would remove a forest without the sacrifice of a sapling."

"Dear me! such assistance will be invaluable should I decide to do so." Opening the door Mr Masheter fell over the indistinct-hued Timothy Figg, who had been stooping by the key-hole. The Admiralty official exclaimed, "My clerk, who will accompany us, by your permission." The clerk held books, ink, and pens; and if not a positive credit to the Government it would have puzzled any one to decide what was amiss, so vague and indefinite was his aspect.

Walking in the direction of the belt of woodland on the borders of the estate, they passed a burly and coarse-mannered individual who asked them the way to the house. Having directed the person, Mr Masheter asked his business. "That's with the owner, or rather with his estate." Which answer caused Mr Masheter some curiosity, and he rather curtly replied, "I am the owner of the estate, sir!"

"And I am the Government Inspector of Property!" Mr Masheter bowed, and walked on with the Admiralty gentleman, who had been as solemn as an undertaker during the brief parley with the Government Inspector.

"If the public continue arriving in this order," thought Mr Masheter, "I shall have to close the doors." And much he wondered what he had done to be thus honoured.

The rough representative of authority plodded stolidly on and walked in at the garden enclosure, there he felt surprise

upon seeing so many, but discovered his partner, and edged over in that direction, to the extreme annoyance of the Landscape Gardener busily occupied in sketching out beds. "Steer off," said Blim, in an undertone; "these are all in for the same game, so you'll have to be extra careful."

"But I don't know what the devil to do!" said Boggis.

"Do as the others do, the business you're here for; we're all busy. Take an inspection of the property, dot it down actively, bring out your lines, fix your pegs, and look a little brisk."

"It's bound to come to a fight at the last; we can't all have it."

"We'll take our chance; it's no worse than we thought: the competition will improve matters: thus far I've got it all in my hands. I expect the old chap's sanction to remove the tree."

"The deuce you do! Better remove the Treasure, I should think!" This was so like Boggis the partner did not reply, and at this moment Mr Beaver skipped up.

"And how do *you* do, sir?" he kindly inquired of the last comer.

"What's that to do with you?" was the polite rejoinder. Like Mr Eli Jebeson, Boggis was not given to waste in the direction of sweetness.

"It's of great interest to me how you do, sir," answered the Beaver, with jovial candour, "because I hope to do better." And before the savage Boggis had time to swear at him in return, the sprightly hatter pounced upon another morose-looking gentleman, the great painter in fact.

Mr Potter was suffering from acute irritation. He had gone down personally to Nugent Priory and obtained the information he sought, and had otherwise gone out of his way to attempt this desperate feat, and the swarm surprised him as greatly as it did Mr Masheter himself. He had failed in discovering if any heir or descendant was in existence; but he had found the secret known to thrice the number of adventurers he had supposed; and altogether Mr Potter felt extremely mortified. If there was one thing he resented more than another it was familiarity, and the familiarity of Phineas Beaver was in his eyes a naked and undisguised horror.

A diversion ensued through the arrival of Mr Dobson and his lecturer, with workmen for erecting the Panorama. The entertainment was heartily welcomed by everybody. When Mr Masheter re-entered the house the exhibition was fixed, and they had only to await Miss Masheter's pleasure to commence. Mr Masheter thought that his visitors would take luncheon first, after which all would no doubt like to see the Panorama.

Dobson and Merry Tattergast were shown to the butler's room, where refreshments were served.

The large room had been excellently arranged by the experienced caterer. The window-shutters were closed, wax-lights, and Mr Dobson's usual illumination upon such occasions, served to impart the more subdued light approved for such purposes. And it looked a sombre brooding convocation when at the other end the assembly was seated. Black, weird, avaricious plotters, and that dignified white-haired gentleman between his darling and them.

Nobody had paid much regard to the lecturer, but when he began to speak another atmosphere seemed created, purer, brighter, fresher. No such voice had been heard in that house that day; culture, travel, and refinement were borne with a splendid eloquence along the burden of his talk; wit burst upon the grim company and caused the longest face to smile; poetry stole with its softer embellishment and made elegant a discourse already singularly clever. Mary Masheter was thrilled and charmed, and her father with a throbbing heart and curious emotions remarked the effect imparted by the impassioned speaker; and all the time, Dobson and his men, insensible to the effect produced by the lecturer, calmly unrolled the Panorama, exhibiting its succession of paintings, keeping time with the points of the lecture.

But there was a sudden interruption, spoiling the effect of Dobson's favourite scene, the Marché au Vendredi, Ghent. The ancient square, poem-like, musical with legends of old Nobility, where the lecturer's voice was always lowered while tremulous pain crept uppermost. At this point the door of the dining-room was opened, a beam of daylight fell straight across the square and upon Merry Tattergast, and it fell full

on another person not seen before; white, dazzling white it seemed, a fine majestic man. He stretched a hand forth pointing to the shadowed audience, and asked, "Is Mr Cobham Masheter there?"

"I am!" Mr Masheter rose while speaking.

"I denounce those persons as fraudulent impostors, all of them! They have entered here under false representations for the purpose of obtaining possession of a Treasure deposited, according to the writing of its owner, beneath the Cedar-tree upon your lawn. For two of them the police are now waiting for the attempted murder of myself; with the others I have nothing to do, thank God!"

"And who, then, are you?" asked the outraged Cobham Masheter.

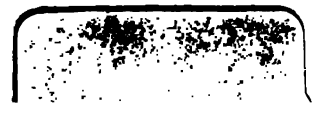
"A descendant of the owner of the Treasure—my name is Saul Weir!"

"One moment there, sir," said the lecturer with dignity, and breathlessly did those in shadow look at that second figure in the broad beam of daylight falling across the Panorama; "you lay claim to the name of Saul Weir?"

"I do, sir," replied the carpenter, turning with surprise towards this figure.

"And so do I."

At that Dobson dropped the curtain.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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